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SCEPTICISM AND FAITH.

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SCEPTICISM AND FAITH;

PAPERS ON THE GROUNDS OF BELIEF.

BY THE

REV. BROWNLOW MAITLAND, M.A.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE papers collected in this little volume are the fruit of an endeavour to treat, for unlearned readers, in a short and simple, yet not superficial manner, some of the chief points at issue in the present conflict between Scepticism and Christian Faith.

Each is complete in itself, but taken together it is hoped that they will exhibit with tolerable clearness an outline of the argument in behalf of Theism and Christianity, which makes its final appeal to the faculty in our nature variously described as the spiritual consciousness, the religious sentiment, and the

religious instinct. The writer is convinced that the key of the whole debate is held by this faculty, which is the organ of religion in the soul ; and that the ultimate basis of faith is to be found in the validity of the witness borne by it to spiritual truths, in proportion as it is enlightened, and strengthened by religious culture.



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SCEPTICISM AND FAITH.

No. I.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT MIRACLES.

“A voice from heaven would not convince me that water burned, fire extinguished, or a dead man rose again.” So wrote Goethe to Lavater, and every year seems to increase the number of those who say the same. There is no disputing the fact, that miracles are discredited as they never were before. The current of opinion has set strongly against them ; to the modern scientific spirit, especially, they are repugnant, incredible.

Now, to Christian men this growing denial of miracles cannot but be a matter of very serious concern, for it strikes at the foundation of their faith. As an historical religion, Christianity is rooted in miracles ; as a revelation

from God it is, at least in part, accredited by miracles. The Christian faith is, that Jesus Christ came from heaven, revealed the Father, scattered around Him supernatural signs of a divine kingdom, died an atoning death, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Let miracles be taken away, and every one of these articles of belief would be emptied of its meaning, and Christianity be reduced to a mere unsubstantial shadow of its former self.

The question of miracles, therefore, presses on us with urgency, and imperatively requires an answer. We must get to the bottom of it if we can. Why are they thus discredited? Is there really sufficient reason for discarding the belief in all miracles whatsoever, as an untenable and ignorant superstition? Must miracles be henceforth classed with things which are so incredible, so monstrous, that no evidence in their favour is worth listening to?

It is plain, that if miracles are rejected altogether in the mass, prior to any scrutiny of the evidence for them, and simply because they are miracles, the rejection must rest on one of two grounds: either, that we know beforehand that a miracle is in itself impossible; or else, that the presumption against its occurrence is so great as to be practically invincible by any

conceivable evidence. These are different positions, and must be examined separately.

The former need not detain us long. That miracles are in themselves impossible is not the assertion of modern science. Physical science rests entirely on experience; it has the actual for its domain; it knows nothing of antecedent or abstract necessity and impossibility. It is not the students of nature, but the metaphysicians—the speculative thinkers—who are not content with knowing things as they are, and go on to dream of an abstract necessity, out of which all existence has emanated, and by which its course is controlled. If miracles are by any pronounced impossible, it is by these.

Let us interrogate them, and ascertain how they satisfy themselves that no miracle can possibly happen. Of course it is not to experience that they appeal; that is not in their line. To observe, experiment, and discover is no business of theirs; they shut themselves up and think. Human thought is, with them, the arbiter of all things; it determines the limits of the possible; it prescribes the lines on which the universe must be constructed. A miracle is unthinkable, they tell us, therefore it cannot be. Thought builds out of itself an ideal universe, and in it no room is found for miracles.

Not that the thoughts of these thinkers run all in the same groove, or present exactly the same ideas of the necessary and the absolute. But that does not alter the conclusion. Whether the necessary and ideal universe of thought is conceived of as a huge machine, without volition or intelligence, going on of itself, and blindly grinding out the successive phases of existence ; or is held to be governed by will, but by will acting in accordance with unvarying law, and ordering all things in "mechanical sequence, just as the steam drives the engine, and can drive it in one way only ; or is regarded as the necessary self-unfolding of the absolute, according to some eternal law which binds all things in the iron fetters of fate ; the result is in each case the same—miracle is excluded.

To all such pretended demonstrations of the impossibility of miracles, what, as seekers after truth and reality, can we say ? What but this ? that the universe thus built up out of human thought, whatever its structure may be, is only an ideal, imaginary universe, and that we have no evidence that it has any existence, any counterpart, in fact. That miracles are impossible in it is no proof that they are impossible in the actual world in which our lot is cast. When we ask, why miracles cannot occur ? it

is no answer to reply that this or that abstract theory of the universe has no room for them, and cannot admit them. We live in a vast and wonderful system of being, of which our knowledge is but limited and fragmentary. Who shall take upon himself to assert that outside and above the physical sphere—within which our researches are confined—there is not, and cannot be, a Power which may, for aught we know, interfere occasionally with the order of nature—in other words, work a miracle? Yet, unless this can be asserted with absolute certainty, and independently of all experience, miracles must be included within the possibilities of existence.

Clearly, then, it is not on this side that the strength of the case against miracles is to be found. The real conflict about them arises within the domain, not of metaphysics, but of actual experience. It is here that we are confronted with the assertion, that though they cannot be absolutely disproved, yet the presumption against them is so strong as to be practically invincible by any conceivable evidence. This is the position which we are now to examine.

Let us inquire how this presumption against miracles grows up in the mind; how they come

to wear an aspect of such extreme and utter improbability as to provoke the mind to an instinctive rejection of them, prior to any examination of the evidence by which they may be in each case supported.

Our minds are so constituted as to derive their estimate of probability from experience. The more accustomed we are to see an event happen, under certain circumstances, with unvarying regularity, with the greater confidence we anticipate its happening again, whenever the circumstances are the same. If, on the contrary, within the widest range of experience to which we have access an event has never been known to occur, then the occurrence of it in the future appears to us in a very high degree improbable. No one doubts that the sun will rise to-morrow; yet the only ground of the expectation is the uninterrupted constancy with which it has risen every day since the world began. But that it should rise to-morrow in the west is incredible, because it has never been known to rise except in the east.

Applying this principle to the case of any alleged miracle, we see at once why it must appear extremely improbable when regarded exclusively from the ground of experience. A miracle, to say the least, is so rare an event,

that the question is whether there is a single fairly authenticated instance of one on record. It is an entirely exceptional event, out of and contrary to the common order of things ; a break in the sequences which appear invariable ; an anomaly in the midst of laws which seem fixed and universal. Hence, looked at from the side of nature, it must strike the mind as highly improbable ; and this improbability does not become less, but appears rather to grow into larger proportions, with every accession to our knowledge of the natural world and its phenomena.

For the more thoroughly we investigate the course of nature, the more deeply we become impressed with its continuity, its unvarying order, its strict accordance with fixed laws. The immense advance in modern times of physical science, the multiplication of observers and discoverers, and the splendid successes of their methods, have augmented our acquaintance with the laws and course of nature, in all departments of physics, to an extent that was formerly inconceivable. And nowhere, throughout all the domains of physical science, has any observer ever detected a break in the sequence of cause and effect. All the processes and all the results of scientific investigation depend on

the assumption that like causes will always produce like effects, and that the operation of natural laws is never interrupted by any unknown and incalculable force, external to nature. The suspicion of an arbitrary suspension, for so much as a moment, of the action of any physical cause, would paralyze every inquiry, and vitiate the results of every experiment. Whatever be the special field of research which any student of nature occupies—whether with the telescope he explores the mechanism of the heavens, or with the microscope pries into the structure of organic tissues ; whether he deals with mechanical, or chemical, or vital forces ; or tracks the vibrations of the luminiferous ether ; or follows the subtle windings of electric energy through earth and air—in every province of nature he pushes forward his investigations in absolute confidence that no extraneous power, from another order of things, shall ever step in to disturb the natural course of events, and he never finds his confidence misplaced.

To the natural philosopher, then, whose conception of the universe is derived from the teaching of physical science alone, the notion of miracle can scarcely be otherwise than extremely repugnant. It is in direct antagonism

to all his knowledge, his experience, and his methods. Rouse him from his experiments or observations to tell him of a miracle, and you awaken all his incredulity and scorn. Anything seems more likely to him than the truth of your story. The testimony on which it rests must be untrustworthy, as testimony often is; the senses of the witnesses must have played them false, as has frequently happened; the incident must admit of some natural explanation, and is only magnified into a miracle by ignorance. If you point out that the circumstances are such as to make it very difficult to accept seriously any of these modes of getting rid of the miracle, he replies that it may be so, but that it is still more difficult to accept the miracle; for, of all conceivable events, a miracle is the most incredible, the most contrary to universal experience. Whatever your evidence is, he pronounces beforehand that it must be insufficient; for the presumption against miracles rests on too wide and general an induction to be shaken by any individual testimony.

Such is the result of one way of looking at miracles. When regarded from the side of nature only, they seem incredible. The mind trained exclusively in physical science, and

deriving its whole conception of the universe from this source alone, instinctively and impatiently rejects them.

Now if this were the only side from which miracles could be approached, it must be confessed that the presumption against them would be insurmountable. Nature herself furnishes no evidence, suggests no conceptions, to counteract the impression stamped on the mind by her invariable order and submission to physical law. Even if it be granted that she witnesses for God, the impression is not weakened ; for the God for whom alone she can witness is one who works by fixed and unalterable laws, that seem to exclude those special acts of will and purpose which we call miracles. It was not, in fact, from an atheistic, but a theistic point of view that Goethe wrote the words quoted above ; for he went on to say that he looked upon the assertion of miracles as a blasphemy against the Creator. Seeing law supreme and universal in nature, he inferred that it must be equally supreme and universal in the God of nature also ; and drew the conclusion that to act otherwise than by fixed, unchangeable rules, of which miracles would be irregular and capricious violations, would be unworthy of the Creator, and contradictory

of His manifestation of Himself in the visible universe.

But is there no other side from which to approach miracles, no other legitimate way of looking at them? The physical universe is not our whole environment; its laws are not the only laws by which we are governed. We are conscious of a spiritual element in our being, to which physical laws are inapplicable. We possess personality, will, conscience, the faculty of religion; all which seem to indicate a spiritual relationship. May not these peculiar prerogatives of our nature suggest a way of looking at miracles which shall take away their repulsive strangeness, and render them not only credible but highly significant.

We have seen that the case against miracles does not rest on a strictly logical basis. They cannot be proved impossible. Experience raises a presumption against them, that is all; a strong presumption, indeed, but not a proof or demonstration. Now a presumption, arising exclusively from one set of facts, may be counteracted by a presumption furnished by another set of facts. Things which seem utterly unlikely when regarded in one connexion, or from one point of view, may possibly wear a totally changed aspect when an entirely new order

of circumstances is taken into account, and brought into association with them. Of such a change of aspect we may borrow an illustration from physical science.

Suppose a person, while unacquainted with even the elements of physics, to come across the assertion that the astronomer can calculate the weight of the planets ; that is, can tell how many pounds a planet would weigh if it could be put into scale on the earth's surface. Judged from the stand-point of his own experience, the assertion would appear to him utterly incredible. He is familiar with the usual modes of weighing bodies, and knows that in every case some access to the body is necessary to the process. It must either be actually placed in the scale, and balanced against a known weight or equivalent force ; or else both its size and material must be ascertained, and then, by weighing a portion of the same material, the weight of the whole mass may be calculated. But in the case of a planet neither process is practicable. We cannot get access to it, either to weigh it, or to discover what it is made of. We can only look at it from a vast distance. And no looking at a body can possibly help us to ascertain what it weighs. It may be hollow, or it may be

solid; it may consist of a light material, or of a heavy; it may be composed of various materials, some light and some heavy, in proportions to which we have no clue. Looking at it from a distance can tell us nothing of all this; and at the planet we can do nothing but look. Its substance may be as light as cork, or as heavy as quicksilver, or it may be an aggregate of many different substances of different densities; looking at it can give us no information on the subject; how then can it be possible to ascertain its weight? The more the assertion is tested by our reasoner's experience, the more it wears the aspect of a hoax or a delusion, and with the greater confidence he pronounces it incredible.

Such is the result when the question is approached from the side of common experience. But, perhaps, when it is approached from a different quarter, its aspect will be entirely altered. Let us suppose our reasoner now to enter on the study of physical science. He learns the methods of geometry, and their application to the determination of distances and magnitudes. He sees how the earth is measured, and then made a base for ascertaining the size and configuration of the solar system. Following the line of discovery, he

comes to understand that all matter is endued, or behaves as if it were endued, with an attractive force, in proportion to its mass; and that this force is alike the regulator of the movements of the planets, and the cause of weight at the earth's surface. And finally, having mastered the relations between attraction, mass, weight, and planetary motion, it becomes evident to him that accurate observation of the movements of the heavenly bodies will lead on to the knowledge which before seemed so impossible of attainment. For such observation reveals how much each planet, by means of its attractive force, pulls its own satellites (if it have any), and the rest of the planets, towards itself, and by the amount of the deflections thus occasioned the planet's attraction, and therefore its mass, are rigorously determined; and the mass, thus ascertained, immediately gives the number of pounds which the planet would weigh if put into scale at the earth's surface.

Thus, the assertion which struck the mind as absolutely incredible, when looked at in one way, changes its aspect entirely when regarded in another way, and becomes demonstrably true.

Let us now inquire if some such change of

aspect be not attainable, by varying our mode of looking at miracles. Instead of contemplating them, as we have done, from the side of nature, let us shift our position, and gradually approach them from the side of our spiritual consciousness.

Among the instinctive beliefs of mankind, none appears more deserving of that name, or more universal, than some form of belief in a God. That one or more beings exist who are superior to nature, and capable of influencing the course of nature, has been held in every age, and by all tribes and nations of men, almost without exception. Among the more cultivated races, this belief has been purged of the elements of grossness and inconsistency, with which ignorance had often encumbered it ; and been refined into a pure monotheism, according to which there is one intelligent, all-powerful, righteous God, on whom all things depend. It is this theism, or doctrine about God, which presents itself to us from our earliest years as the true explanation of the universe. We do not invent the theory for ourselves. We find it already made, and existing everywhere around us ; we inherit it from the ages before us ; it is the embodiment of the universal, or almost universal, voice of mankind.

Now, as soon as we are capable of reflection, we find this belief eliciting a response from our moral sense, fitting in with the emotions of our religious instinct, and approving itself to our judgment. When we look around on the universe, and observe its order and harmony, and the evidences of intelligent and benevolent purpose of which it is full ; and the inquiry arises within us, how this wonderful fabric could have been originated, and by what power it is sustained and governed ; it is this theism, this doctrine of an intelligent and gracious Creator and Lord, that presents us with the only answer that has ever been suggested. When again we look into ourselves, and discern that we are persons, not machines, nor animals ; that we are endowed with intellect, will, a moral sense, a religious faculty, a desire for immortality, a yearning to know and worship and find rest in some unseen Being above our sphere ; it is still the same theism that steps in to explain us to ourselves, as nothing else has ever done. Being what we are conscious of being, we cannot rest satisfied with being told that our existence has arisen out of the blind ferment of unintelligent atoms and forces, and will speedily sink back into the same. Our personality, our intel-

ligence, our moral and spiritual attributes, all constrain us to imagine some personal, intelligent, spiritual Being from whom they are derived; and it is such a Being whom theism sets before us and points to as our Creator.

On the whole, then, this theory or doctrine of the existence of God, which from the dawn of our thought wraps round and permeates our intellectual and moral life, finds support in almost all that we observe of the external universe, and are conscious of in ourselves. It may not be a complete explanation of everything that demands explanation; no doubt it leaves some mysteries unsolved, some difficulties still burdensome to our minds. But to say only, that it is the completest theory that has ever attempted to account for the phenomena of the universe, would be greatly to underestimate the fact. It is absolutely the only one; it has no competitor; as an account of the ultimate cause and origin of the varied mechanism and life of the world it occupies the field of speculation alone.

It is particularly to be noticed that the God who is thus suggested to us, and to the idea of whom our reason and our hearts respond, is far more than a cause, or force, or intelligence.

The general sentiment of mankind ascribes to Him personal will and moral qualities, and conceives of Him as caring about us, dealing individually with us, and exercising a moral government over the world. This view finds a response in our own consciousness, just in proportion to our advance in the scale of virtue. Righteousness, truth, sympathy, benevolence, love, these form our idea of goodness; these furnish the standard by which we measure human conduct. Must not these qualities, which are the glory of man, have first existed in his Maker? Could mere force have originated goodness, mere intelligence have given birth to righteousness and love? So we are irresistibly impelled to ask, when we speculate on the nature of God. Can we place Him below ourselves? How can we have gained a higher elevation than is occupied by Him who is the fount and origin of our being? We care for our parents, our wives, our offspring, our friends, our fellow-men; if we conceive of a God at all, can we reasonably conceive of One who does not care for His children?

We have now made the first step of our approach towards miracles. It is the strong probability, engendered by many different but converging lines of thought, that an Almighty,

righteous, loving God really exists. Our next step is found in the connexion of this doctrine with Christianity.

It has already been remarked that, as nations grew more enlightened, they purged their theism from the grosser elements that adulterated it, and arrived at a pure, spiritual, monotheistic conception of God. We now go on to observe, that among all the nations which lead the van of human progress, and are foremost in culture and knowledge, this conception of God has received a special form, by being cast into the mould of Christianity. The vaguer idea, of a righteous and benevolent Creator and Ruler, has ripened into the conception of a heavenly Father, who has manifested Himself in His Son Jesus Christ for the redemption of His erring children, and is guiding them by His Spirit to a blessed immortality. By this idea of God modern Christendom has been created. We can trace back its working historically through eighteen centuries, and discern its beneficent influence and world-subduing energy. We can see how it shattered the ancient idolatries, infused a new and purer spirit into society, moulded human character to a higher excellence, and gradually transformed the face of the civilized world.

Comparing modern Christendom with the ancient Pagan world, he must be blind indeed who does not perceive that Christianity, taking it altogether in its actual achievements and inherent tendencies, has been to our race as life from the dead. Hindered though it has been by human passion and perverseness, there is scarcely a province of human life which it has not touched with a renovating hand. To the strong it has taught gentleness and chivalry, to the weak resignation and patience. On lawless violence, cruelty, slavery, it has stamped its brand of reprobation; sensual and unnatural vices have been driven by it into the obscure haunts of infamy; against the rule of imperious force it has held up the sacred law of right, against the brutal demands of selfishness it has enforced the generous sacrifices of love. It has lessened the frequency and mitigated the horrors of war, ameliorated legislation, raised the aims of government, bound men together in holy brotherhood, and restored the weaker sex to its due respect and honour. It has produced a roll of martyrs, philanthropists, saints, to which the annals of history can furnish no parallel; it has nurtured millions upon millions of men and women in spiritual purity and good-

ness, cheered their struggle with the inevitable ills of life, and shed brightness over their descent into the grave. And so far from being exhausted by its achievements in the past, it still holds the imperial portion of the world in its embrace, and goes forth to break up new fields in the moral wastes of humanity, and win fresh conquests over the enemies of the peace and happiness of our race.

Now looking at the past story, the present existence, and the intrinsic character and tendencies of Christianity, we feel entitled to urge that they are sufficient to sustain a strong probability of the truth of the central idea on which this religion rests, and of which it is the realization, imperfect indeed as yet, in human history. That idea is the conception of God as a loving Father, who has manifested Himself to us in Jesus Christ for our redemption. That a mere illusion or falsehood should have been capable of supporting such a system through long ages, and filling the world with its beneficent fruits, is scarcely conceivable, and would certainly be a course of things without a parallel in experience. A conception of such vitality, such moral fruitfulness, such continuous regenerating power for the world, has at least some claim to be considered, by

any candid observer, as more likely to be true than false. And if the probability be in favour of its truth, we have made a clear step forward in our argument. We first inferred, from a large circuit of varied facts and experiences, that the probabilities are in favour of theism—that is, of the existence of a God who cares for us. Now, from a different set of facts, equally varied, we have inferred the probability that God has actually shown His care for us, by acting towards us in a manner, and by means, which lie outside and above the common course of nature. When we have reached this point, a single step more, of the easiest kind, will place us in the presence of miracles.

For this imperial, world-conquering, benevolent Christianity can be traced to its beginning. We know historically that it arose in the first century of our era, and had for its author Jesus, a man of Jewish race, who was put to death by the enemies of His teaching, when scarcely a third of that century had elapsed. We know with equal certainty, from the four epistles of St. Paul (the first to the Thessalonians, that to the Galatians, and the two to the Corinthians), the authorship and dates of which have never been seriously called into

question, even by the most sceptical critics, that within thirty years after the death of Jesus, and while many who had known Him personally were still living, various communities had already been formed out of Jewish and Pagan society, which were founded upon, and held together by, the faith that He was in very truth the Son of God, who had come from heaven into the world to manifest the Father, and, after being crucified by His opponents, had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. We know also that early in the next century, if not before, when this faith, in spite of both political and religious hostility, was spreading far and wide through the cities of the Roman Empire, four biographies of Jesus were universally accepted by all the Christian communities, as furnishing correct delineations of the life and teaching of the great Master in whom they believed; and these biographies, familiar to us all under the name of the Gospels, not only describe a character and a career which are perfectly unique in literature and history, and bear the strongest impress of reality, but distinctly assert that Jesus authenticated His mission from God by working beneficent miracles as signs of the divine kingdom which He was introducing, and finally by

rising from the dead after His crucifixion and burial.

This, then, is the state of the case. The greatest moral, religious, and social phenomenon that ever appeared in the world, bringing healing and blessing for the weary and sinful, and filling the ages with the evidences of its transforming energy, had its rise eighteen centuries ago in an obscure teacher, whom His opponents, out of bigotry and envy, put to death at an early age. Within a few years of His death thousands of persons, shaking off the ties that bound them to their religion and kindred, and braving all manner of violence, and even death itself in its most terrible shapes, that they might be true to their convictions, are found associated together by the belief that this teacher came from God, set up a supernatural kingdom of truth and righteousness, performed miraculous acts of mercy, and crowned His wonderful career by rising from the dead and going up into heaven. This belief they set out to impress on their fellow-men, not by force nor by bribes, but by preaching a doctrine which, notwithstanding the repulsiveness of the Cross, found an echo in the human heart and conscience, and by exhibiting a life which shamed the impure and selfish life of the world around

them. And they succeeded. It mattered not that they were often slandered, robbed, tortured, and killed ; that now the imperial Government attempted to exterminate them, and now the populace rose against them in frenzied outbreaks of violence. The faith spread ; it invaded the schools of learning ; it swept before it the idolatrous temples and altars, with their foul orgies and mocking hypocrisies ; it mounted the imperial throne ; it gathered nations under its sway ; modern Christendom is the result of it, and it gives promise of fresh triumphs in the future. This, we say, is the case before us, to be reasonably dealt with, estimated, and explained.

Now to which side of the question about miracles does this wonderful series of facts give probability ? If the assertion of Christianity be true, and Jesus really came from God, witnessed to the divineness of His mission by doing supernatural acts of mercy, and triumphed over death by rising again ; then the facts hang together consistently, and the results are accounted for by an adequate cause. But if He were as other men, a mere unit of the general mass of humanity ; if He lived only a common life, speaking out of His own imagination, and doing His own will under the

ordinary limitations of human action, and knew no resurrection from the dead ; then the facts do not hang consistently together, and the results are not accounted for by an adequate cause. Then there is a breach, at the very starting-point, between the man Jesus and the amazing development and triumph of His religion—a breach which no sceptical ingenuity has ever been able to devise a method of bridging over. The obscure Jewish teacher is swept from the earth in early manhood by a storm of execration and violence ; His few followers are stunned and scattered by the blow. If He rose not from the dead, there is the natural end of it all. But presently we find them proclaiming that He did rise, boldly facing an incredulous and hostile world with this assertion, living and dying for it, conquering and regenerating the world by it. Which now seems more likely, more in accordance with the ordinary laws of human conduct and historical sequence,—that the assertion was true or false ? Surely, as unprejudiced men, we must answer, that the whole testimony of historical fact leads back to the resurrection of Jesus as the only adequate starting-point of Christianity ; and if that be miraculous, then the historical development of

Christianity throws all its weight on the side of the probability of at least one miracle having occurred.

Let us now review the course over which we have travelled. Setting out from the almost universal prevalence of theism among mankind, and especially among the higher and more enlightened races, we found in the instinctive character of this belief, in the order and harmony of the universe, in the manifold appearances of intelligent design in the world, and in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties of which we are ourselves conscious, many and varied reasons for concluding that theism, on the whole, furnishes a rational and likely explanation of the mystery of being ; and that the existence of a God who cares for us, and exercises a moral government over the world, is in a high degree probable. Then in the past history, present aspect, and unexhausted energy of Christianity, we saw this probability greatly strengthened ; and discerned fair grounds for thinking that God has actually shown His care for us in a method of dealing which lies outside and above the natural order of the world, and belongs to a higher sphere of operation to which physical laws are not applicable. Here we are already on the border-

land of miracle, already breathing the atmosphere to which miracles are congenial. For if the divine method of dealing, which the facts of Christianity suggest and render probable, be itself supernatural, then individual miracles, if they seemed to occur in connexion with that method and as essential parts of it, would be in strict correspondence with its general character. Lastly, by tracing Christianity historically to its source, we found ourselves brought step by step into the presence of at least one event of a miraculous character, as the asserted and only probable starting-point of Christendom, and of the religion and Church of Christ.

Let the reader now observe how smoothly and easily, and yet with what unintermittent cogency and force, this induction moves on from its foundation in the actual facts around and within us, to its conclusion in the miraculous features of the history of Jesus. Let him put his finger, if he can, on any single point in it at which there is an awkward break, any one step at which his mind can honestly revolt, on the ground that the weight of the evidence is against it, and that it is so improbable as to be incredible. Bearing in mind that it is not demonstration that is aimed at,

or even pretended to be attainable, but only a fair and reasonable estimate of probabilities, on the same principles by which the truth of any historical statement may be tested; let him ask himself whether the cardinal fact of the resurrection of Jesus be not so led up to—alike by the arguments and testimonies which support Christian theism, and by the long succession of most conspicuous and important consequences that seem to be traceable to that alleged fact, and are not otherwise easily explicable—as to make it on the whole considerably more probable than not, from the historical point of view, that the early preachers of the Gospel announced a fact, when they testified to the world that Jesus rose from the dead.

And if the answer be, as surely on all sound principles of historical argument it must be, that the real difficulty lies in the miraculous character of the alleged event, and that, were it not for this, the weight of the evidence would undoubtedly be in its favour; let the force of this admission be considered. It allows that the historical, the moral, the spiritual, arguments or reasons all lie on one side, and throw their weight in favour of a certain miracle having actually taken place; and that there is nothing to place in the balance

against them, except an antecedent, abstract presumption against miracles. Whether this presumption be entitled to outweigh every other consideration, and constrain our verdict to be on its side, is the only question with which we have still to deal.

We have seen that the presumption against miracles arises from looking at them from the side of nature. “In all our experience of nature,” says the objector, “we find no trace of miracle. Law reigns everywhere; order is unbroken; effect follows cause universally, in invariable sequence. There is no breach of continuity, no interruption, no disturbance, no sign anywhere of the interference of an extraneous force. Miracles seem alien to the whole constitution of things, and are therefore incredible.” But we have also seen that if, instead of deriving our impressions from nature, as searched and interpreted by physical science, we set out from the phenomena of our spiritual consciousness, and prosecute our inquiry through the facts of human history which are related to this part of our being, we are led on step by step, in spite of any opposition we can fairly offer, to the probability that a certain event once happened, and that event is clearly of a miraculous character. Here

are two methods of investigation, equally valid; and yet they lead to conclusions so different as to appear at first sight contradictory to each other. That miracles are so improbable as to be practically incredible, is the issue of one method of inquiry; that at least one particular miracle probably happened, is the result of the other.

What now are we to do? Are we reduced to saying despairingly, that these conclusions neutralize each other, and leave us helplessly ignorant on the subject? Or can we discover some mode of reconciling or combining them, so as to found upon them some structure of belief which reason may not be ashamed to acknowledge?

It is to be remarked, that a negative presumption differs in kind from affirmative evidence, and is never in ordinary matters considered sufficient to rebut it or set it aside, provided that the evidence is not vitiated by any manifest weakness or taint. In a criminal trial, for instance, it is no answer to the positive evidence against the accused, whether direct or circumstantial, to prove that he has hitherto borne so good a character, as to render it very unlikely that he should have committed the offence with which he is charged

on the testimony of competent and credible witnesses.

Again, a negative presumption holds good only so long as the conditions under which it arose remain absolutely unchanged. Let them vary ever so little, and its force is gone ; for the experience gained under the old conditions is no longer applicable under the new, and what may have been improbable then may, for aught we know, have become probable now. Or, reversing the order, things which present experience shows to be utterly unlikely now may possibly have been very probable in the remote past, when some condition existed which has now ceased to operate. To the inhabitant of a tropical plain, the presumption against water ever becoming solid would appear of the strongest kind, for such an event would be contrary to all his experience ; yet he has only to change his climate for a colder one to see the improbable event come to pass. So also, the formation of a glacier in the Scotch Highlands, at the present time, is shown by experience to be in the highest degree unlikely, for as far back as historical records extend such a phenomenon has never been observed there ; yet we know from geology that there was a time when, under other conditions of climate, glaciers were plen-

tiful enough in that region, and the rocks bear the scars inflicted by them to this day.

Once more, to prove a negative is proverbially difficult ; the testimony of a single competent witness to the occurrence of some event would avail more to establish it, than the declarations of a thousand equally competent witnesses, that no similar event had ever occurred within their experience, would avail to disprove it. Hence the only legitimate effect of a presumption, grounded on experience, against the happening of an event is to make us scrutinize more closely and jealously whatever positive evidence is offered to prove that it has actually occurred.

Applying these well-established principles of evidence to the case before us, they appear to guide us to the following solution of our difficulty.

The scientific argument may be fairly allowed to have made good the position, that miracles must be exceedingly rare and exceptional events, out of and contrary to the common and regular course of nature ; and that the presumption against them, generally, on that ground is amply sufficient to discredit the pretence of them under all ordinary circumstances. But beyond this limit the argument cannot

justly be held to be decisive against miracles ; because it is wholly unable to show, that there cannot ever arise, in the course of human development, some great, exceptional crisis, in which the Ruler of the world (whose existence cannot be disproved) may see fit to put forth His hand in a special manner of dealing ; and a supernatural order of things, always lying unseen behind nature (for that too cannot be disproved), may for some grand purpose be manifested within the natural order. Let the physical argument, from the continuity and regularity of nature, be held to cover all the rest of the ground, and to be sovereign and supreme in such times as ours, and under all ordinary circumstances ; yet it cannot cover this possible exception, it cannot prove that no such exception can occur. Taking his stand on that argument, the man of science may with perfect justice demand, that if any such exception is alleged to have occurred in any period of the world, clear, cogent evidence shall be brought forward to establish it. But to go further, and take on himself to pronounce the idea of such an exception inadmissible, would be to step beyond the space which the argument covers, and to give a judgment for which it fails to furnish him with any reasonable ground.

Here, then, the other line of argument, from man's spiritual consciousness, environment, and history, comes in, to make good the exception for which the scientific argument, after being pushed to its utmost legitimate limit, still leaves room. Gathering together its materials from a wide review of the phenomena of human life and thought and development, this second line of induction establishes the probability, that there is a God and Father of mankind, who deals with them according to spiritual laws; and who, in order to raise them out of ignorance and despair, did in a great crisis of their history manifest to them His power and goodness, by signs in the midst of nature that were above nature, and beyond the range of her familiar order and processes. Thus the two lines of argument come into harmony, and find a mode of living in peace together. The rights of science, that noble gift of God to these latter days, are vindicated, and its voice is listened to with respect. It is allowed to sweep away from the domain of reasonable belief the crowd of vulgar miracles that are isolated and aimless, mere prodigies, unnecessary to the manifestation of the spiritual order, and the communication of the knowledge of God. On the other hand, religion is allowed

rule and supremacy in its own higher sphere; the spiritual faculty within us is not driven into a corner, or deprived of its proper nutriment and exercise; and room is left for the exceptional miracles, with which revelation and Christianity are inseparably bound up.

In conclusion, the reader will observe, that the subject has been treated as one in which absolute or formal demonstration is not possible, and only more or less of probability can be arrived at. But to what height that probability may rise in his individual case, and to what ripe and fruitful conviction it may give birth, will greatly depend on the vital activity and the experience of his own spiritual consciousness.

If he were content to regard himself as nothing more than a part in the natural order, or a transient being struck out by the blind collision of atoms, and governed by the physical forces of the universe in common with the ranks of existence beneath him, and were to deem the claim of mankind to belong to a higher, a spiritual order, a vain and baseless dream; if no voice from above, no whisper from the unseen, ever awoke an echo within him, thrilling his heart with a desire to worship and to trust; and no recognition of the sacred-

ness of duty ever filled him with awe, no vision of the fatherhood of God and of brotherhood in Christ ever rose bright and attractive on his mental sight, stirring within him strange yearnings and hopes ; then indeed the supernatural would of necessity seem to him so far off and unreal, that the probability of its manifestation, within the sphere of the natural, must shrink up into the most attenuated and shadowy dimensions.

But when, on the other hand, he recognizes within himself capacities, desires, hopes, that point upwards, and seem to link him to a higher world than this visible world of matter and force ; when he is conscious of a response within himself to the revelation, which Christianity professes to make, of a heavenly Father redeeming His children, and training them for immortality ; then this vexed question of miracles will assuredly appear to him to be lifted above the region where physical law is supreme into the higher sphere of divine providence and grace,—a sphere where things that are above nature may find a fitting place, if only they are charged with spiritual significance, and employed as instruments to convey to us a clearer knowledge of God.

And when the question has thus become

connected in his mind with the spiritual aspirations and destinies of our race, he will be at no loss for helps to advance from the outer region of probability to the inner shrine of faith. In every witness borne by the universe to the presence in it of a divine intelligence and goodness ; in every instinctive longing of the heart to be embraced in a spiritual order, wherein its unrest may be exchanged for peace ; in every thrill of wonder and adoration that has ever swept through his soul, as he gazed on the portraiture of the Son of man ; in every beneficent influence that Christianity has exerted, to shape and stimulate human progress and quicken the higher life of mankind ; in all these and many other facts, both within and around him, he will catch glimpses, undiscerned by the eye of unbelief, of the divine presence and working in the world. It is thus that the intuitive consciousness of God grows up in the recesses of the soul, and issues in the matured and dominant conviction that God, in ancient times, did manifest Himself to us in His Son Jesus Christ, and “ raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.”

No. II.

EVOLUTION IN THE DEBATING
ROOM.

I PROPOSE in this paper to give some account of a discussion which lately took place in the lecture-hall of a Literary and Scientific Institute, on "The Bearing of the Modern Theory of Evolution upon Religious Belief." Under cover of that great theory so many attacks are made on Christianity, and so much support is claimed from it for downright atheism, that I am disposed to think that the sifting which the subject underwent on that occasion may become useful to many persons, who have no more than a vague and superficial acquaintance with it.

In the Institute to which I refer, much interest is taken in the physical sciences, and books of general information on these subjects are eagerly read. Several of the members are very fairly acquainted with the principal modern discoveries, and the speculations founded upon

them; and among these more advanced students of nature, it is no wonder that the speculative theory known as Evolution, the widest and grandest scientific generalization perhaps ever made, should have powerfully arrested the attention, and impressed the imagination with its singular comprehensiveness and magnificence. There also exists in the Institute, as unhappily is not unusual in such bodies, a party which is strongly impregnated with sceptical ideas, of a more or less advanced character; and between this and the side which keeps a tight grasp on the Christian creed frequent skirmishes have arisen, in which the theory of Evolution especially has furnished effective weapons to the assailants of religious belief. At last it was decided to give an evening to as full a discussion of the relation of Evolution to religion as was practicable, and I was requested to preside as chairman, with a right to interfere from time to time in the debate, with such questions and remarks as I thought advisable to keep it straight and help it forward to a definite issue.

When the evening came, I opened the proceedings by reminding the audience that we were not met to discuss the sufficiency of the scientific evidence to sustain the theory, which

was a task manifestly above our abilities ; but, provisionally accepting the theory in its main features as well-founded, to inquire how far it necessarily led to consequences at variance with the elementary articles of the Christian faith, respecting God and man. Having recommended the speakers to abstain from the use of hard, technical words, and to be satisfied to employ plain, popular language, such as all might understand, I called on the spokesman of the sceptical party to tell us what they meant by Evolution, and to show in what way they deemed it to be adverse to the doctrines of religion.

"Evolution," he explained, "is the process by which simpler and lower types of being grow, under the operation of natural laws, into higher and more complex ones. Things have, for the most part, a capacity of change and improvement. The hard, tasteless wild berry becomes in course of time, through cultivation, a juicy and delicious fruit ; the lank-boned, scraggy wild animal is developed into one which yields abundance of succulent and nutritious flesh for human food. These are instances of Evolution brought about by man's skilful interference with nature. But nature of herself effects similar developments. She throws out varieties

that are in some respects better than their predecessors or rivals; and these, having an advantage over the others, gradually displace the older types in the struggle for existence, and thus races are permanently improved.

"Taking a wider view, and looking back through the immeasurable vista of ages, during which the world has been growing into its present condition, it seems that Evolution, or the development of races, has always been going on with unintermittent step since the earliest germ of life made its appearance. The present human era was preceded by one in which man had not yet come into being, and the warm-blooded animals were the highest types of life. That again had for its fore-runner an age in which no creatures above the cold-blooded reptiles existed. And so we may go back and back, finding each stage ruder and more elementary than its successor, until we reach the dawn of animal life in zoophytes and sponges, and, perhaps still farther back, of vegetable life in forms that were but cells or germs of the simplest character. Here is Evolution on a grand scale, each grade of being appearing to grow, by a natural unfolding, out of the one before it, and the whole exhibiting

a continuous advance from lower to higher types of life.

"Nor is that all. The whole physical universe exhibits incontestible marks of having followed a similar course of development. We trace our globe back to a red-hot solid ; thence to a ball of liquid fire ; and still back to matter diffused in a gaseous form of incalculable tenuity. And as with our globe, so also with all the heavenly bodies, till we reach at last the primitive condition of the universe, and find ourselves in the presence of nothing but inconceivably vast clouds of incoherent, uncombined atoms, diffused as a gas or an ether in the measureless regions of space.

"Farther back than this science cannot take us. Here the mighty Evolution begins. This nebulous universe of diffused atoms is the starting-point of the drama of being, and contains wrapped up in itself the promise and potency of all future existence. No quickening touch, no guiding power, from without are needed ; it is self-evolving ; its whole career henceforward is a natural growth. Atom acts on atom, molecule on molecule, according to their inherent tendencies and properties : and as the ages roll on, worlds spring into being ; life appears ; races are gradually formed, and

make their struggling advance from lower to higher types, through the mutual action of their vital energies and their physical environments, until man at last crowns the series, and himself pursues a like upward career of development, from the primitive savage of the age of stone, till he culminates in the civilized European and the modern philosopher.

“This,” said the speaker, “is what we mean by Evolution ; the universe developing itself, by its own inherent forces and tendencies, out of the primordial atom-chaos, unguided by intelligence, unconscious of its growth, uninfluenced by any power outside itself.

“Now it appears to those who think with me,” he went on to say, “that supposing this theory to be a true one, and correctly to represent the process through which all things became what they are, no room is left for the two most fundamental ideas of the Christian, or indeed any other religious creed; these, namely, the action of a God, whether in creation or providence, and the existence of a spiritual, immortal element in human nature.

“If the universe unfolds itself, unintelligently and unconsciously, by the operation of its own inherent energies, and according to its own physical laws, how can it witness for a God,

for whom on this supposition there is absolutely no need? The advocates of natural theology used to urge that the complex organisms of the natural world point to a contriving intelligence, which must have designed and created their beautiful and delicate mechanism, and adapted it to the circumstances in which it was ordained to exist. But Evolution shows that design and contrivance had no part in the matter. Blind, unconscious, unintelligent forces have done it all. By these the primal germs of life were developed out of hitherto dead matter; and these germs, by their own vitality, and the action upon them of their physical environment, have been gradually shaped and fashioned, until they have grown, by minute and scarcely distinguishable degrees, into those complex organisms, which suggest to our minds the ideas of intelligent contrivance and adaptation. There really being no purpose, no intention, no exercise of intellect, in the whole process from beginning to end, the only ground on which the inference of an intelligent creating Will could rest is cut from under our feet.

“ And as with creating intelligence and purpose, so also it seems to us to be with upholding and guiding Providence. The idea

of it has become inadmissible. Till we knew that the course of Evolution was necessary and continuous and self-governed, an external power might have been supposed to step in and direct it. But as soon as we have ascertained the true method of the universe, and recognized its self-evolving energy, we see that it needs no other guide, nor admits of any, and no place is left for a divine Providence.

"And, further, we maintain that the theory of Evolution irresistibly confutes the idea that man is distinguished from the rest of the animal world by the possession of some higher, some immaterial and immortal, element in his being. The child of Evolution, like all his relatives throughout the sentient world, there can be nothing in him that did not first exist in the primordial atom-chaos. He can be nothing more than one particular combination, however felicitous and exquisite, of the original atoms, brought together by unintelligent forces, to be dissolved again when his little day is over, like all the other combinations which make up the kingdoms of animal and vegetable existence. Hence, a spiritual essence and an immortal destiny seem to us to be vain dreams for mankind. The individual but rises for a

moment out of the mighty ferment, and presently falls back into it again, to furnish materials for his successors in the ever-advancing drama of Evolution."

When the speaker sat down, I remarked that three alleged consequences of the theory of Evolution had been definitely and boldly put before us. First, that it did away with the need of a creating intelligence; secondly, that it excluded the action of a divine providence; and, lastly, that it confuted the claim of mankind to possess in their structure any element of an immaterial, spiritual, or immortal kind. These consequences, if established, plainly carried with them the entire destruction of religious belief, and of religion itself except as a mere instinctive sentiment; for if we are neither created nor governed by God, nor possessed of any spiritual faculty for knowing Him, or of any capability of immortality, the whole fabric of religion is left destitute of any foundation whatever. It was therefore of the utmost importance to examine the validity of these deductions from the theory of Evolution; and I suggested that those who intended to contest them should take them, one by one, in the order named.

Upon this a member rose on the opposite

side, and said that he should speak to the first point, and endeavour to show that Evolution is no substitute for God, and that the notion of its rendering a creating Intelligence needless is as illogical and baseless as any romancer's idle dream.

"You start with your ready-made atoms," he said, "and very wonderful things these infinitesimal particles seem by your account to be. No intelligence directs them, no consciousness resides in them; they move about of themselves, blind and purposeless, and run into all manner of combinations under I know not what impulse or guidance. If they merely tumbled into heaps of formless rock, or flats of desert sand, one would scarcely be surprised, or tempted to demand an explanation of their achievements. But they scorn such petty triumphs. Nothing is too arduous, too lofty, for them. Wandering about, not knowing what they are doing, these senseless particles, you assure us, fall of themselves into combinations of the highest complexity, beauty, and utility. They originate countless forms of life, endowed with those exquisite vital mechanisms that throng all the provinces of sentient being; they produce out of themselves intellect, conscience, science, poetry, religion;

out of their mazy dance spring heroes, patriots, philosophers, saints. The magnificent procession of being that has passed, and is passing, across the stage of Time, is all composed of these atoms, is nothing but these atoms. In your unconscious atom-clouds, out of which the universe grew, floated the materials of the imagination of a Shakspeare, the intellect of a Newton, the spiritual intuition of a St. John ; and out of that primordial chaos these astonishing results, if we are to believe you, have been developed without the smallest guidance of intelligent or conscious purpose.

“ Was ever anything more amazing ? What various and subtle properties these constituent atoms must possess ; what elaborate and highly-endowed things they must be ! A fount of printing type, that should be able to arrange itself into a poem like the ‘ Iliad,’ or a drama like ‘ Hamlet,’ would be but a poor toy compared with these marvels of blind creating energy. Surely to manufacture things like these, fraught with such energies, and pregnant with such consequences, would demand an intelligence, a skill, a foresight, a knowledge, which, in comparison of any faculties of ours, are inconceivable and infinite.

“ Now, whence do you get these wonderful

atoms to start with? You cannot say that they always existed, and had no beginning; for then the whole cycle of Evolution would have been already completed in the eternal Past, before Time began; whereas it is certain that Evolution can be traced back to a beginning in Time. Nor can you suppose that they made themselves; for that would be to invent an infinity of self-creating beings, to get rid of a single eternal self-existent one. There they are, in the beginning of Time; and you must account for them, or else confess that your solution of the mystery of the universe is incomplete—is, in fact, a failure.

“When I ask, Who designed and framed the complex mechanism of an eye or a hand? you take me back to the primordial atoms for an answer. Well, I go back to the atoms, and repeat my question, and demand, Who made these senseless particles, and endowed them with such marvellous properties that they were able to fashion an eye or a hand? You cannot tell me; you have pushed back the difficulty a single step, and there it faces you again just as before. You cannot escape it, however far back you go. From the evidences of intelligent design all around you in Nature you fly to the Past; but they pursue you without ceasing.

They accompany you backwards, through all the stages of Evolution, till you have taken refuge in the primordial atom-chaos ; and there, where your headlong flight from them is finally arrested, they still throng around you, and confront you with a demand, no less urgent than at first, to explain them, if you can, without the intervention of a designing Intelligence.

“ So far, then, from Evolution superseding the Creator, and accounting for the existing universe without Him, we on this side maintain confidently that, at the utmost, it can do no more than push back His direct intervention to a remoter stage, where it is just as necessary as ever. And we challenge you, in the name of common sense, to show, if you can, that Evolution, without God to start it on its course, is a whit less unreasonable and absurd than the notion that an iron chain can hang vertically of itself in the air, without any support at the top, if you only prolong it upwards till the topmost links are hidden in the clouds.”

On this speaker resuming his seat, the murmur of applause showed that he had carried the general feeling of the audience with him ; and I accordingly proposed, as time was precious, that we should at once proceed to

consider the second alleged consequence of the theory, namely, that it excluded the action of a divine providence. A slight pause ensuing, I added that the position to be examined was this—that Evolution went on of itself, and left no occasion nor room for the sustaining or controlling action of God ; and I looked towards one of our members who, I knew, had lately been giving his attention to the nature of our conceptions of force. In answer to my glance, he rose and spoke as follows :—

“ The preceding speaker,” he said, “ has put his finger on the primitive atoms, and forcibly demanded that their existence, and their amazing constructive properties, should be reasonably accounted for, before it is conceded that Evolution dispenses with an initial act of creative intelligence. It shall be my endeavour now to show, that even when we have got the atoms to start with, we are still unable to conceive any mode in which the development of the universe out of them could have taken place, unless we bring in the additional element of the continuous action upon them of a motive will.

“ Let us clearly understand the problem before us. The atoms are the ultimate portions of matter. They may possibly be of many shapes and kinds, or all exactly alike—no one knows ;

but each atom is conceived of as indestructible and unchangeable, and the whole number of them remains the same. No single atom is ever annihilated or altered; ever added to or subtracted from the universe. Hence all the change they admit of is a change of position. They may approach each other, or recede from each other, and be combined in all kinds of ways and proportions; and out of these movements and combinations all the phenomena of the material universe must arise. Could our sight penetrate so far into the constitution of matter as to distinguish these ultimate particles, all we should see would be their rest or their motion, their remaining in certain collocations, or moving to form others. From beginning to end, Evolution can be absolutely nothing else than the successive movements of these unchangeable atoms.

“Now I want to know what it is that moves them. If they had not moved, the universe would never have got out of the primitive stage of nebulous chaos. They must have begun to move, and have continued to move, and that with motions of infinite complexity and intricacy. What is the cause, the guide of their motions? You tell me, the forces of nature. But I want a little more precision. If you

mean that, besides the elementary atoms, there is some great force, or sum of forces, marshalling them in their wonderful career, I cordially assent, and have only to ask you to agree with me in naming that force, or sum of forces—God. But that is just what you are trying to avoid; so you tell me the forces you mean are physical forces, inherent in the atoms. You must pardon me if I still fail to comprehend your explanation. Here is a senseless particle of matter; you see it move, and other particles around it move also, and that is all you see. I ask you to account for these movements, and you tell me that these particles exert forces on themselves and on each other. Are you not using words for what you really know nothing about?

“Remember that you are rigorously proving that Evolution proceeds of itself, and there is no need of God. You have a substitute for Him: it is these alleged forces, inherent in the atoms. But you never saw these forces; they are a mere figment of your imagination. What you do see is only a movement of particles of matter, nothing more; the idea of force is supplied out of your own mind. And how did you get the idea of force? I will tell you. You willed to move some lump of matter; it

resisted your will, and you were conscious of making an effort to overcome its resistance. The making of that conscious effort you call the exertion of force. Force, then, in the only form in which you have any knowledge of it, is a conscious effort of the will, and its effect is the production of movement. Wherever you see movement, you therefore infer the action of force. But you cannot stop there; you must go on to infer the action of will also as the origin of the force, or else you contradict the testimony of the experience which alone has furnished you with the conception of force.

“Now come back to the atoms. You see them move, and rightly say that there is force at work. But unless you mean that there is will in action to originate the force, you use the term ‘force’ in a sense for which your knowledge and experience furnish no justification, for you have no acquaintance with force apart from will. Well, then, if these atoms move, it is to will that we must trace their motion as its ultimate cause. But whose will? You dare not say their own; for that would be to turn every atom of matter into a personal agent, of inconceivable power, wisdom, and foresight. It must be a will outside and above them—the will of God, without whom not an

atom could stir, not a step of Evolution be accomplished.

"It appears, therefore, to us to be demonstrable that the theory of Evolution, so far from enabling us to dismiss God from our conception of the universe, is unworkable without a God; and that His agency is required, not only to start the mighty process of development in the beginning, but also to sustain it at every instant of its subsequent course."

Here one of the sceptical side got up, and protested that this was an incomplete answer to the argument that Evolution leaves no room for the operation of a divine providence. To sustain the physical forces of nature is one thing; to administer a providential government is another. Providence implies special interpositions, adjustments, adaptations of events to the circumstances of individuals. The uniformity of general laws is fatal to it. What had been urged by the last speaker, if admitted, went no farther than to establish the action of a divine will in upholding the laws of nature; it failed to show how those immutable laws could leave any room for a discriminating providence.

At this point I thought it best to interpose, and say that it seemed to me that we should

be extending our debate beyond its proper limits, if we attempted on this occasion to discuss the difficulty of reconciling a particular providence with the uniform order of nature. This was a difficulty which had not originated in the theory of Evolution, and had no special connexion with it, but was common to every scientific conception of the continuity of natural laws. We had better, as we still had a good deal before us, go on at once to consider the last alleged consequence of Evolution, that it leaves us no ground for attributing any spiritual or immortal element to the nature of man.

In the member who rose to speak to this point, I was very glad to recognize one whose well-known character for intelligent and practical piety peculiarly entitled him to be heard on a question which involved the reality of religious experience. He spoke with an earnestness and solemnity of tone which showed how deeply he felt the importance of the matter at issue.

“When I reflect, sir,” he said, “on my own daily experience, and remember that the idea of relationship to an unseen Father above, in whom I live and move and have my being, ever presents itself to my mind as expressing

the greatest reality of my existence; that under a sense of this relationship I look up with reverence and awe, yet with humble trust and hope; that from it I derive whatever purity, strength, and peace of heart I possess, and by it am animated to live a sober, righteous, and godly life; when, I say, I reflect on these facts of my daily personal experience, I listen with incredulous amazement to the assertion which has been made this evening in the name of science, about the origin and structure of human nature.

“To tell us, who are conscious of experiencing within ourselves the whole circuit and volume of moral and religious thought and emotion, that we are nothing but bundles of such material atoms as rocks and trees and brute beasts are composed of, aggregated for a moment by the blind action of physical forces, to be presently whirled out of existence again by the same forces, seems to me, I confess, little less than an outrageous absurdity. And if it be retorted that this is the conclusion to which scientific investigation has led impartial observers and reasoners, in spite of their predilections, and that the theory of Evolution, based, not on a few facts noticed here and there, but on a comprehensive scrutiny of the whole course and story of nature, rigorously leads us on, step

by step, without possibility of halting, to this degrading view of man ; I reply, without a moment's hesitation, that to construct a theory of human nature out of some general hypothesis about the physical universe, while omitting to take any account of the most peculiar and essential characteristics of man himself, as they are revealed to him in his own consciousness, is certainly not the method of true, patient, cautious science, but rather of ignorant and blundering presumption.

“ But does Evolution, rightly understood or reasonably held, drive us necessarily to this conclusion ? I think not. It seems to me that I can hold that theory generally, in its main features, as indicating the mode of God’s working in nature, and yet believe myself to be something more than a mere transient conglomerate of material atoms ; and I will try to show you plainly why I think so.

“ In this task, what has been already urged in defence of theism gives me the greatest help. Had Evolution been able to establish itself as a sufficient explanation of the universe, while leaving out God ; to bring in God for the first time at this late stage, and only to account for man, would, perhaps, have justly appeared to be far-fetched and improbable. The atoms

which had, on that supposition, evolved every-
thing else out of themselves by their own
inherent energies, might possibly have been
considered capable of evolving man also. This
would have been but a single inexplicable
wonder more. But we have been shown, as
clearly as logical reasoning can exhibit any-
thing, that Evolution will not work at all with-
out God; it is but like an engine without a
motive power. God is necessary, both to start
it and to keep it going. He must create and
endow the primordial atoms; He must sustain
their properties and forces, must animate and
guide their course. In following, therefore,
the amazing career by which these elements of
the nebulous chaos have attained their present
configuration, we must take along with us the
idea of an originating and presiding Deity, and
conceive of all existence as being the product
of His will and purpose. Of the whole of this
majestic Evolution we must regard Him as the
Cause and Lord, and for the manifestation of
His glory and goodness we must believe that
He has ordained, and continually sustains it.
Evolution with God is something very different
from Evolution without God.

“Let us pause for a moment to ask ourselves
whether, so far as we can form an opinion, this

divinely ordered unfolding of the universe was more likely to be with, or without, some adequate purpose in view. And if an adequate purpose strikes our minds as the more probable, let us go on to ask ourselves, whether any purpose can be reasonably deemed adequate, or worthy of the Creator, which stops short at mere transient configurations of material atoms, either in plants, or beasts, or human beings. For my own part, it appears to me no presumption to think, that in this stupendous and magnificent putting forth of creative and constructive energies, the Creator must have had in view beings of a higher class than mere perishable bundles of matter; beings who should bear some spiritual relationship to Himself, and be capable of permanently adoring and rejoicing in Him.

“ But be that antecedent probability great or small, in following the actual course of Evolution we come upon a perfectly unique phenomenon, a race of beings distinguished from all the rest by greater differences than those which separate the most highly organized mammal from the most rudimentary zoophyte—differences, not so much of physical structure, as, which is far more important, of mental and spiritual endowment. If any one is inclined to make a lower estimate of the pre-eminence

of mankind, let him place the most highly trained dog, or the most sagacious ape, beside a Moses, an Isaiah, a Paul, a Dante, a Luther, or a Milton ; and let him avoid the confession, if he can, that comparison is impossible, classification together inconceivable. It does not matter that the earliest specimens of this unique race may have been, apparently, little in advance of the tribes of the animal world beneath them ; in reality, they were immeasurably superior, for the capacity of development into saints, and prophets, and heroes, and kings of thought, was in them, and was not in the others. Nor does it matter that in bodily structure this unique race approximates to the topmost ranks of the lower creation. Their bodily form is their least prerogative ; it is in intellect, in imagination, in moral and religious faculty, that they are unapproached and supreme.

“ Now, I ask, what are we to make of this phenomenon ? Has Evolution, which, if anything, is a succession of scarcely distinguishable steps, suddenly taken a leap from brute instinct to piercing intellect, from grovelling animalism to aspiring spiritualism ? View the matter in what aspect you please, here there is a manifest break, an undeniable gap, over

which your theory can never carry you, to any reasonable man's satisfaction. You may claim for it, if you like, the human body, with its exquisite organism, and the appetites and instincts of its animal life, and so far you may possibly imagine man to have been developed out of the races beneath and before him; but the REASON and the SPIRIT—never! Here is a totally new element of being, to which nothing in the whole foregoing Evolution leads up; a divine spark, not to be accounted for by any manipulation of material atoms, or growth of animal instincts, and of which explanation is impossible, unless it were kindled by the hand of the Almighty Evolutionist Himself, when He had prepared a fitting tabernacle for it, and was pleased to place on the earth an image of Himself.

"This, then, is my answer to the statement, that Evolution confutes man's claim to be anything more than a transient agglomeration of material particles. Whether the theory be true or not, as a scientific account of the formation of the physical universe, I do not know. But these things about it I do know. First, that it can never be strictly proved; it is but an imperfect generalization from certain physical facts within our observation, which facts bear

to the whole number of facts, necessary to the demonstration of the theory, no larger a proportion than a handful of sand bears to the immeasurable shores that gird the oceans of our globe. To use a generalization of this precarious kind, to get rid of the force and meaning of other well-authenticated and palpable facts,—facts of our inmost consciousness and spiritual experience—which lie altogether outside its limits, and refuse to be brought into subordination to it, would be in the highest degree contrary to all real science and sound philosophy. Secondly, that inasmuch as there is nothing within the compass of our knowledge to suggest the possibility of life being originated by the self-evolution of a physical universe, in which no life previously existed, the first introduction of life was, so far as we know, a break in the evolutionary sequence; and the introduction, still later, of a spiritual nature for man may just as well be another break. Thirdly, that among the facts on which the theory of Evolution is based, the unique rational and spiritual faculties of human nature are not numbered, but on the contrary stand out conspicuously from the induction, and are an intractable exception to it, and would compel us to reject its

validity; unless, with one of the illustrious founders of the theory, we frankly confess that at least the higher element of man's nature is no part of the evolutionary sequence, and is only to be accounted for by the direct creative interposition of God.

"On these grounds I maintain that I can be an Evolutionist as regards the physical universe, and may even hold it probable that my own bodily structure and animal life have come to me through a gradual development from some primeval germ; and still I may yield myself, without inconsistency, to the overpowering evidence which convinces me that, in my higher part, I am a spiritual being, a child of God, and an heir of immortality."

As no one seemed inclined to continue the discussion, and the hour was already advanced, I thought it time to close our proceedings with a few concluding remarks.

No doubt, I said, the theory under examination, owing to its simplicity and comprehensiveness, has a powerful charm for the scientific intellect. It removes the necessity of imagining numberless independent acts of creation; in some measure it accounts for the existence of large tribes of creatures, which it is difficult to suppose the Creator to have called into being

by separate and immediate acts of His Will : and it binds together the whole order and contents of the visible universe, in a unity of unparalleled breadth and grandeur. To the Christian philosopher it cannot but be welcome, as a very noble exposition of the divine foresight and mode of operation, provided the whole mass of facts within our observation yield themselves, if not actively to support it, yet at least to fit in with it harmoniously, and without violence being done to them.

We must not, however, forget that it is purely a physical theory, derived by an induction from physical facts alone. The whole moral and spiritual world revealed to us in our consciousness lies outside it, and rests on independent evidence of its own, with which Evolution has no title to interfere ; unless it can prove that even the highest attributes of human nature—its personality, conscience, intellectual and religious faculties—are purely physical phenomena, as much so as crystallization and chemical affinity, gravitation and magnetism. But such a proof is impossible ; and, if possible, would be suicidal. Impossible because it would contradict the witness of our consciousness, which is the ultimate basis of all our knowledge ; and suicidal because, in con-

tradicting the witness of our consciousness, it would destroy our only ground for believing that there is such a thing as a material or physical universe for Evolution to explain. Besides, as the last speaker has remarked, it is a theory rather suggested by a comparatively small induction, than firmly based on a complete one; the mind may be said to leap to it by an instinct, more than to be constrained by cogent proof to adopt it. There are, and ever must be, enormous gaps in the evidence for it, gaps occupied only by gratuitous assumptions or unverifiable guesses. Hence, it behoves the philosopher, if he would escape the risk of being betrayed into serious errors, to hold Evolution modestly, and with deference to other great lines of belief which claim our allegiance on independent but equally valid grounds. If he would reject with scorn any pretension of theology to invade the domain of physical science, let him remember that such science has no better right to meddle with the laws and order of the spiritual world, as they are made known to us in our consciousness.

Even between kindred physical sciences there is, as the student of them well knows, what may be called a deference due from one to another, by which they are restrained from

wantonly trespassing on each other's domain, or impugning the results of each other's observations and methods. Who that knows anything of the logical basis on which each rests, would not count it an impertinence and an absurdity to take, for instance, some inference from the law of gravitation, and base on it a denial of molecular and capillary attractions, or of the imponderability of the luminiferous ether and the magnetic current? But it would be still more contrary to sound reason, to invade the spiritual domain with inferences drawn from some purely physical theory; as if any amount of such inferences could possibly counterbalance the independent evidence, on which our belief in the spiritual order firmly reposes.

It may sometimes happen that two collateral theories, occupying separate provinces, and established each on its own evidence, may have points of contact, and at those points may appear to meet with hostile aspect, or come into collision with each other. But, in such a case, the last thought of the sincere searcher after truth would be recklessly to turn them one against the other, in internecine warfare, to their mutual destruction. Rather will it be his fitting and welcome task, to examine

the true limits of each; to reconcile their apparent discrepancies, and adjust them accurately to each other. It is thus that truth is ascertained, and the boundaries of human knowledge are enlarged.

How such an adjustment may be reasonably effected, between the great physical theory of Evolution and the doctrines of religion to which it is superficially alleged to be adverse, has been shown, I think, very clearly this evening. Two of the speakers have argued with great force, that Evolution, so far from being capable of explaining the universe without God, is really an unworkable theory unless it be supplemented by Theism. And the last who addressed us has pointed out, with equal clearness and force, that the introduction into the great drama of existence of the highest and unique part of human nature, is really a fact which is alien to the sequences of Evolutionary succession, and may be reasonably held to indicate a direct interference of the Creator's hand. In this way, the relations of the theory of Evolution to religious belief appear to be satisfactorily adjusted, and the result of our debate is to show that we can, if Science requires it, be hearty Evolutionists, without abating one jot of our Christian faith and hope.

No. III.

PROVIDENCE AND SCIENCE.

Not long ago I was taken to task by a free-spoken, sceptical acquaintance, for using the word "providential" of some event, which by its unexpected occurrence had lightened the burdens of a very deserving person. He wondered that I could gravely use language which, if it meant anything, implied that the natural and necessary order of events is sometimes interfered with and altered, by the arbitrary exercise of a power superior to nature, for the purpose of bringing about a result which would not otherwise happen. Surely I was sufficiently acquainted with physical science to know that its cardinal axiom is the unbroken continuity of the natural order, and the invariable succession of events according to the laws of material causation; so that each

event is rigorously determined by those which precede it, and the whole course of the world is a necessary evolution, admitting of no interruption or modification. It was unworthy, he added, of our modern culture, to go on clinging to the superstitious notions of our ignorant forefathers, who, whenever they were unable to account for what happened, ascribed it to some supernatural interference with the natural order of events. Such notions would render science impossible, and the sooner they were got rid of the better. He did not wish to be profane, but he must frankly say that to his mind providence is a word that has lost its meaning.

In reply, I told him, that if he had blamed my use of the word "providential" to define some particular event, on the ground that all events are ordered by providence, and are therefore equally entitled to the epithet, I should have been more ready to confess the justice of his rebuke. To describe some as providential seems to exclude the rest, and deny that providence has anything to do with them. But, after all, that objection would be more showy than substantial. What is meant by calling an event providential is not, that it is ordered by providence and others are not; but that it is one in which we think ourselves

able to discern, whether rightly or not, special purpose and intention, and are thus led to connect it in an especial manner with the will of the divine Ruler of the world.

But since he censured my use of the word "providential," on the ground that no events whatever are entitled to that description, I could not for a moment admit the justice of his criticism. To my mind the idea that physical science has exploded providence was eminently unscientific. One might as well assert that the discovery of the law of gravitation had exploded the laws of taste, the authority of conscience, or the moral glory of love. If he was of the opinion of the unscrupulous general, who scoffingly said that providence is always on the side of the strongest battalions, I, for my part, found more sense, as well as more reverence, in the much older saying, "The Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's."

Of that conversation the following discussion, of the relation between physical science and the idea of providence, is the fruit. The subject appeared to me to be so important, in an age when the extension of physical knowledge seems increasingly to be thrusting out of sight the higher truths that address themselves

to our spiritual faculty, that I resolved to sketch out, as clearly as I could in a brief compass, and in a popular way, an outline of the argument for providence, with especial reference to the scientific objection ; and this sketch I now submit to the candid reader.

I shall treat, first, of the evidence on which our belief in providence rests, and then of the difficulties which that belief meets with, particularly in the apparent continuity and order of the natural world.

What do we mean by providence ? The word expresses God's government of the world ; His direction of its course ; His oversight and regulation of its events, so as to work out by them His own divine purpose. And the vital question is simply this : Does God rule the world, or not ? Is it His world, ordered by Him, and made to fulfil His purpose ? or is it an independent world, going on its way without Him ?

I repeat, that this alone is the vital question. All other questions about providence are secondary to this. It may be of the highest intellectual interest to know, how providence is exercised, supposing there is a providence ; how God rules, if indeed He rules : whether by original adjustments, made with infinite

foresight ; or by a system of unchangeable laws, so devised and impressed on the world as automatically, so to speak, to work out His purposes ; or by secret, successive interferences of His will with the natural order of events ; or by any other conceivable method. These are questions, undoubtedly, of great interest for the intellect, but the one grand question which comes before them all, and alone is vital to our faith and hope, is the simple question of fact, Does God rule the world ?

Very little consideration is needed to see that this question is practically one with the question, Is there a God ? Providence and Theism must stand or fall together. A God who does not rule is no God in any intelligible sense of the word. If there be above us an almighty, wise, righteous and merciful Being, by whose will we and all things came into existence,—in other words, if the living God be a reality, and not a dream,—we cannot conceive of Him as not looking after His creatures, and caring for them. A God who has abdicated His throne, a Creator who has abandoned His creatures, a divine Father who takes no thought of His children, are simply inconceivable.

Every one, therefore, of the reasons by which

theism is sustained and justified furnishes a support for the doctrine of the divine providence. How many and cogent those reasons are can be only briefly pointed out here.

Why do we believe in a God who knows us and cares for us? Because we find in ourselves a religious instinct, which impels us to search for God; which yearns to know and worship and trust Him, and will not let us rest without Him. Because we are conscious of a law of duty, impressed on our hearts, which speaks to us with a divine authority, and witnesses for a righteous Lawgiver who will reward us according to our works. Because, as we have an eye for light, an ear for sound, a taste for beauty, a perception of moral excellence, so also we have a spiritual faculty, which, in proportion as it is cultivated by the practice of piety and goodness, recognizes and responds to the presence and the voice of the unseen God. Because we are unable to conceive of any source or origin of our own personality, except One who Himself possesses will and thought, righteousness and love. Because the entire procession of finite existence down the ages of Time is inexplicable to our intellect, without a creating power and purpose to originate it. Because the world is full of exquisite organisms

contrivances, and adaptations, which irresistibly suggest to our minds a wise Intelligence as their original cause. Because in the midst of a universe of changing and transient phenomena, our intellect and our heart alike demand some eternal, absolute Being, as the ground of all existence, on whom all that is relative and fleeting may repose. Because against the abounding injustices of the world our hearts rise in indignant protest, and their passionate longing for justice finds no satisfaction, except in the conviction that there is above all a just God, who in His good time, and by His own methods, will right undeserved wrongs, and make all crooked things straight.

On such grounds as these our belief in the living God rests. They are not demonstrations; they do not even make up a demonstration among them. They depend for their force on the spiritual faculty within us; to the logical understanding they present little more than vague probabilities, which can never be a sufficient foundation for worship, trust, and love. But to the moral sense and the religious sentiment they are conclusive. Led by them up to the footstool of the eternal throne, the humble, devout soul sees God by a spiritual intuition, and the conviction of His being and

rule becomes its ineradicable possession. God and His providence are thenceforth inalienable truths of its experience, and ever fruitful sources of its peace and hope.

Such is the way in which the belief in providence becomes established in our minds; and with every gain of religious experience we cling to it with a more tenacious grasp. We have the witness in ourselves, that nothing short of this faith in God can redeem human life from hopelessness, and make it tolerable for spiritual beings, such as we feel ourselves to be; nothing else can still the agitations of the soul that is conscious of its immortality, or satisfy its longing for a higher life than that of the animal or intellectual faculties. By our spiritual constitution we crave for a God of perfect wisdom and goodness, in whom to trust, and whom to love; and to put us off with such idols as force, and fate, and physical law, would be but to mock our need, and leave us desolate and hopeless.

But now as we go out into the world, and bring this belief into contact with nature and history, we find difficulties in harmonizing it with the results of our observation. There is a moral difficulty. Things do not seem to go on as we should expect them to go on, if they

were indeed ordered by a just and merciful Father. The actual course of the world does not appear to manifest a divine righteousness and goodness supreme over it. Wickedness is not invariably punished, nor goodness invariably rewarded. The innocent often suffer, and the guilty as often escape. These apparently unfair and crooked things oppose a moral difficulty to our belief in the universal rule of God. There is also an intellectual difficulty. All events seem to come about by merely natural causes, and to follow in a regular and necessary succession. We are never able to detect any interruption of their natural sequence, any arbitrary modification of them, or interference of any kind with their course. Physical laws appear to reign with absolute and unimpaired supremacy. How can this unbroken continuity of nature be consistent with the belief, that God directs the course of events by His will, uses them for our moral training, bends them in answer to our prayers, and makes them the instruments of working out His wise and gracious purposes for our world?

Such are the difficulties which confront our belief in providence. To the intellect, no doubt, they are of a serious magnitude, and perhaps complete answers to them are scarcely

as yet within our reach. But, before considering them, let us make this clear to our minds, that our belief does not depend on our finding solutions for them. To solve them would be a satisfaction for the intellect, but is not a necessity for our faith.

Will an objector urge, that to believe, in the face of an unexplained difficulty, is irrational ? I would reply to him,—It is what you yourself, and all of us, are doing continually, and find ourselves compelled to do ; to act otherwise would be to renounce all knowledge whatever. You believe in the law of gravitation, as the most thoroughly ascertained, and the most universal, of all physical laws, but can you make the faintest guess, how a particle of lifeless matter here attracts a similar particle in the planet Neptune, thousands of millions of miles away ? You trust the electric telegraph to flash your message to a distant friend, a whole ocean apart from you ; but have you the slightest notion what it is that moves the needle there, in almost instantaneous correspondence with the needle here ? You believe that by agitating the air with your throat and lips you can excite ideas and feelings in the minds of your audience, but have you the vaguest conception how these minute agitations

of the particles of air are transmuted into human thought and emotion? You act as if your will was practically free to choose or reject, but can you logically vindicate its freedom against the arguments of the necessitarian? You believe in matter, in force, in causation, in numberless other things, of which nevertheless you are unable to give any sufficient explanation to satisfy the intellect; indeed, there is not a law or a phenomenon, in the whole circuit of your observation, of which you can furnish a complete account, how it is, and why it is: yet you do not refuse to believe that laws and phenomena are something more than illusions, or superstitious fancies. If then, in every province of experience, you are believing what you cannot entirely explain or understand, why should you think it irrational to believe in providence, in spite of unexplained difficulties in the mode of its exercise?

The fact is, that, with our limited capacities, it is idle to think of clearing up all difficulties and unravelling all perplexities. To suspend our belief till we have done so would be never to arrive at belief at all. What is really irrational is to sacrifice our knowledge to our ignorance. When some fact or law has been

established by a wide and patient induction, we rightly accept it and hold it fast, notwithstanding that something may still remain obscure in its ground or its operation. Especially is it reasonable to act thus in regard to great spiritual truths. They rest on their own independent evidence, and are apprehended by intuition, rather than proved by logical demonstration. The spiritual faculty within us is the only supreme and ultimate judge of their reality ^x and value; and when they have thoroughly approved themselves to that, and are firmly held in its grasp, and felt to be necessary to its life and strength, it would be the merest folly to dream of surrendering them, because of some unsolved difficulties that may cleave to their skirts. The unexplained existence of evil, for instance, is no valid reason for refusing to believe in a God of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; and, on the same principle, faith in the divine providence would not be irrational, though we were unable to discover any satisfactory way of reconciling it either with the natural order, or the moral disorder, of the world in which we live.

Having premised this, let us go on to look the alleged difficulties in the face. When we have taken their measure and estimated their

force, we shall probably be convinced that it is to our ignorance, rather than our knowledge, that they owe their weight.

The moral difficulty need not detain us long, nor is it the one which this discussion has principally in view.

It may be summed up in the question, How can a just and good God be ruling all things, when in so large a degree justice fails, and evil abounds in our world? And truly the difficulty would be enormous and insuperable if this present life, and its outward visible things, were man's only inheritance. In that case most of the wrong done would be irremediable; most of the suffering without compensation. But the conditions of the question are entirely changed when we recognize, above the visible and temporal things, a spiritual and eternal world. Then the good and evil of this outward, visible life are dwarfed into comparatively insignificant and fleeting circumstances of our lot, and their very inequalities may become the instruments of training our nature for higher station and nobler enjoyment hereafter. Then God may permit the innocent to suffer, and the evil-doer to escape and triumph here, without impeachment of His wisdom and goodness, seeing that He has all eternity before Him in which to

compensate the transient suffering and avenge the transient wrong.

Such is the general reply to the moral objection to providence, and it is theoretically sufficient. Where it seems to fail is in its particular applications. In ten thousand instances we are unable to perceive the reason why suffering is sent or wrong permitted. But our inability to discern the reason is no proof that there is no reason. If we believe in God at all, we must believe Him to know more than we know, and to act with a wisdom that is far above our reach. The narrow limits of our vision may seem to enclose little more than a hopeless tangle, yet with Him, whose sphere of action is boundless and eternal, our little tangled fragment may really be a portion of an infinitely wise and gracious scheme, in the progress and fulfilment of which all shall come right at the last.

The intellectual difficulty which opposes our belief in providence will occupy us longer. It arises, as I have already remarked, out of the apparently unbroken continuity of the natural order. "I cannot believe," says the scientific sceptic, "that there is any moral purpose ordering events, or shaping their course, or adapting them to the changing circumstances of human

character and conduct ; because the more thoroughly we study nature, and gain acquaintance with her mysteries, the more is the conviction forced upon us that all events come to pass in obedience to general laws, which act mechanically and uniformly, without discrimination or design, and the operation of which is never suspended or interfered with, by any will or purpose outside and above nature.”

Now let us examine whether anything that science has taught us about nature is really fatal to the idea of providence.

We have no reason to think that man is able to suspend or modify any of those universal rules or properties, impressed on matter, which we call laws of nature. He does not seem to be able either to create, or to annihilate, the smallest quantity of matter or the feeblest amount of force. Take what natural laws we will—whether of attraction, or crystallization, or chemical affinity ; of motion, or heat, or light, or electricity ; of vegetable or animal life ; or any others—we must accept them as fixed, ultimate facts, beyond our power to change. Yet we know from our daily experience that, within the sphere of his action, man can modify the consequences of natural laws, and direct their operation, so as to alter the course of events to

an almost unlimited extent. Unable to subvert a single physical law, man working under them, as the conditions of his activity, can employ them all for his own purposes, and by his will set in motion whole trains of events which otherwise would never have come to pass.

Instead of resting in general statements, let us take a few specific instances as illustrations of man's power over events.

Here is a desert island. Man discovers and occupies it; rears in it herds and flocks, corn and fruit; modifies even its climate by his industry; makes it the home of a nation, the seat of an empire, a new centre of human civilization and progress.

Here is a man struck down by apoplexy, and on the point of expiring. But the surgeon swiftly steps in with his lancet, relieves the oppressed brain, and saves the man, who thus survives to originate enterprises or make discoveries, by which perhaps even the world at large is affected.

Here is coal, lying hidden and useless beneath the soil. Man discovers and extracts it, compels it to drive his looms, work his machinery, carry him and the products of his toil across continents and oceans, and connect by new bonds distant and alien nations.

Here is a statesman, guiding the affairs of his country in a critical period. Full of health and vigour, he pushes on his schemes, and gathers round him the hopes of his land and the fears of its enemies. But an assassin's hand strikes him down, and the course of history is changed.

These are simple illustrations of the power over events which man continually exercises, and without which all his endeavours would be in vain, and all his actions useless.

Now, if it be a fact of universal experience that man's will, while unable to suspend or alter a single law of nature, is yet able to change and guide the succession of events to an incalculable extent, we cannot reasonably think that the Creator of man has less power over the course of the world. If we believe in Him at all, we must credit Him with the ability to exert, if so He wills, a directing influence over the course of events without the necessity of suspending or abrogating any one of the laws which have been impressed by Him on nature. The touch of His hand cannot be less efficacious than the touch of man's hand. Providence may guide and rule, without in the least degree violating natural law and order.

"Very likely," rejoins the objector; "but is it not unworthy of an infinite Being, and inconsistent with His necessary attributes, to act in that discontinuous, occasional manner, which your notion of providence requires? Man is a creature of impulse, of caprice, of very partial knowledge and limited foresight; he cannot help acting by fits and starts, on the spur of the moment, and with reference to the circumstances immediately around him. But how can we conceive of the omniscient, eternal God being moved by some trivial, momentary circumstance to put forth His hand and give a push here and a pull there, for the purpose of altering the course of events which to Him, if He notices them at all, must be infinitely petty and insignificant? Nature is our surest guide to a right conception of God. She is His handiwork, and reflects His likeness. Her laws are constant, her action regular and unintermittent, her results general and undiscriminating; and such as she is, such ought we to conceive her Author to be."

To this objection it may be replied—first, that it is by no means necessary to the idea of providence that it should be carried on by unconnected or fitful interferences; its laws, though lying in another sphere, may be as

regular and constant as the laws of nature : and, secondly, that it is but a small part of our idea of God that we derive from the physical world. When we look into ourselves we discover personality, will, conscience, affection ; and we are sure that our spiritual part, in its best and ideal form, possesses far more of the image of God than do suns and stars, mountains and oceans. We thus learn that God is much more than a Cause or Force. He is a wise, loving Father, and we are His children, the members of His earthly household. But how could He be a Father to us without suiting His dealings to our individual wants and states ? Which would be the more perfect household ; one in which all the arrangements went on in a mechanical, unvarying round, whether the children were sick or in health, froward or tractable, rebellious or penitent, quarrelsome or loving ; or one in which the special state and circumstances of each were wisely cared for, and the treatment of each was individual and discriminating ? Surely the idea of a God who cares patiently and lovingly for each ; who hears and answers prayer, and “ tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,” is far worthier and nobler than that of One who has no ear for His children’s cry, and sits indifferent and

inactive above the struggles and sorrows of our race !

The objector, however, is still far from being silenced. He has another arrow in his quiver —an arrow which, he thinks, will inflict its death-wound on providence. “Whether God is able to interfere,” he says, “and whether it would be worthy of Him to interfere, with the course of events to which the laws impressed by Him on His creation give birth, may be matters of doubtful speculation ; what is plain, as a matter of actual fact, is, that He does not interfere. Science cannot discover a trace of His intervention. She sweeps the heavens with her telescope ; lays bare the brain and nerves with the anatomist’s knife ; pries into tissue and germ with her microscope ; observes and classifies phenomena with unwearyed assiduity ; fills her registers with facts for comparison and verification. Yet nowhere does she come across a single sign of a disturbing interposition of arbitrary will ; nowhere does she detect anything but continuous order, uninterrupted sequence, invariable law. The idea of providential intervention was evidently rooted in ignorance, and knowledge has proved it baseless.”

X

O vain objector ! do you not see that if you

had detected the touch of God's hand in the phenomena of the world you would have found, not providence, but a miracle? It is of the essence of our conception of God's providence that it should be discernible only in its results. Its springs are hidden from us; screened by a crowd of second causes; buried in recesses which no human eye can penetrate, no human research lay bare. If you imagine that there could be no directing interference by God without its being open to detection by human intelligence, you must know little of the utter incapability of even the most advanced science to track the subtle chains of causation in all their obscure ramifications. Every event is linked to countless other events which have contributed to bring it about, and the most imperceptible modification of any of these might have entirely changed its character. Every event depends on such minute arrangements and movements of the ultimate atoms of matter as necessarily elude the most searching observation; and among these, for aught that science can tell, may be concealed the mystery of the divine ordination of events. To the eye of God alone is the subtle and intricate network of causation naked and open.

Let us again, as before, bring the matter to

the test of specific instances, which will serve as illustrations of the impotence of science to unravel the web of causation.

Here is a sufferer, lying in the last stage of exhaustion from low fever, and hanging between life and death. Will he live or die? Will the vital power just last long enough to bear him through the crisis, or will it fail and expire? No one can tell, not even the ablest physicians. They do what little they can to keep in the flickering spark of life, supply the waste of the ebbing strength, and ease the pressure of the malady on the centres of nervous force. Alternating between hope and despair, they watch and wait, as uncertain of the result as the child that looks on in silent wonder, or the dog that moans uneasily at the door. At last, in the very extremity, a turn for the better comes. A gentle sleep steals over the sufferer, from which he wakes with a quieter eye and a reviving pulse. The danger is past, the life is spared.

Now let science inform us, if it can, with exact precision, why this person has come back to life from the very gate of death; why the trembling balance of his destiny has settled one way rather than the other. Obviously science cannot tell us. It could not even

foresee or calculate the result, much less can it explain the exact causes of it. Suppose it were suggested that the merciful hand of God may have been concerned in bringing it about; that, for instance, He may have been pleased to fortify the secret springs of life by an invigorating touch; or that He may have interposed to check the molecular action, which, if allowed to run its course, would have been fatal; or that He may, by some inappreciable impulse, have directed the mind or hand of the physician to give the right aid exactly at the right moment; or that in former years, by means wholly unknown, He may have prepared the sufferer's constitution to sustain the shock of disease, and rally from its exhaustion. Supposing that any of these suggestions was hazarded, it is certain that science would not be able to allege a single fact in disproof of it. As to seeing into the heart of the mystery, the highest human knowledge is precisely on a level with the profoundest ignorance. And let us suppose further, that this sufferer's life was exceedingly valuable to a family, a nation, or the world; and that earnest, unselfish prayers had gone up from many devout hearts for his recovery; and that the happy result was believed by them to be God's

gracious answer, stirring them to thankfulness and praise : would the professors of science have any grounds, in their knowledge of phenomena, for pronouncing that belief to be illusive, and that grateful sentiment superstitious ? Assuredly not ! If they could not share in the faith and thankfulness, at least a reverent silence would become them ; and not a word of contradiction could issue from their lips, unless, belying their own principles, they took on themselves to substitute prejudices for reasons, and to pronounce a verdict when they had no facts on which to base it.

Let us go on to another illustration. Here is a child playing on a road, along which a runaway carriage is wildly dashing. A moment more, and the little life will be crushed out. But a stranger, who by chance is asleep under a neighbouring hedge, starts up at the noise, instantly perceives the peril, bounds over, and makes the frenzied horses swerve by his sudden apparition ; and with a rare courage, activity, and address snatches up the child unhurt, who thus escapes the deadly peril, to live and do important work in the world. Now, let us try to enumerate the number of critical and delicate adjustments required to bring about this result. On one side, the

strength, speed, and temper of the horses ; on another, the state of the road ; on another, the build and weight of the carriage, and the precise line of its advance, determined perhaps by previous obstacles ; on another, the presence of the stranger at the spot, the noise needed to wake him, the precise moment of his waking, the quickness of his perception, his presence of mind, his courage, dexterity, and strength—such are some, and only some, of the elements that needed to be brought together in a certain definite relation and proportion. Moreover, these elements depended, for their precise quantity or quality, on many foregoing circumstances, stretching back in some cases over long periods of time. The builder of the carriage and the breeder of the horses had something to do with the result, as well as the driver and his employer; so had the direction of the wind, the state of the weather, and the material of the road. Still more concerned in it were the constitution, faculties, and habits of the man who effected the rescue ; and even, as contributing to make him what he was, his parentage and ancestry. And then we must add, besides, the whole train of events, perhaps a very long and complex one, which occasioned not only his being present at the critical

moment, but also his being in a condition fitted for prompt and energetic action. Now, looking at the immense complexity of this tissue of circumstances, could any human being reasonably pretend to be sure that there was no single point in it all, at which God's finger or touch could influence the result, without His interference being open to detection, even by the most accurate and scientific human observation?

Once more, let us draw an illustration from nature. In an abundant harvest devout minds have often recognized a token of God's favour and blessing; in a scanty and failing one a sign of His displeasure, and a chastisement for sin. We all know the melodious strain of the Hebrew Psalmist:—"Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; Thou preparest their corn, when Thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; Thou settlest the furrows thereof; Thou makest it soft with showers; Thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness." So also another sings of the reverse of the picture, and in drought and famine discerns the divine judgment, which

"turns a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." Now is all this a mere ignorant superstition? Has science exploded such ideas by furnishing incontrovertible proofs, that of fertility and barrenness there never are nor can be any causes except purely natural and physical ones? Surely to do that is utterly beyond the reach of science! Think of the number of the circumstances, and the remoteness of many of them, on which the character of a harvest depends. Equatorial heats and storms, polar icebergs and floes, solar spots, electrical currents, oceanic evaporation, local sunshine, temperature, and rainfall, the mysterious development of minute insect and fungoid life; such are some of the things on which fertility and barrenness are suspended. Now of such things as these, what accurate and complete account can human science possibly give? Is it not obvious that there are countless points at which these things may be influenced by the will of God, without the possibility of our being able to perceive the operation of any other than purely natural causes?

On the whole, then, it seems clear that the objection to providence, founded on the sup-

posed rigorous and unbroken continuity of the natural order of the world, entirely fails. Notwithstanding the great and varied discoveries of science, in every department of physics, it has not assured us, and there is no prospect of its ever being able to assure us, that nature is really continuous in any sense that is inconsistent with its being governed by the will of God. Natural laws may be proved to be unchangeable and uniform in their operation; but there is a long interval between the laws and the events that come to pass. The laws are the conditions under which all actions are performed, and all events occur; but they do not determine what any particular action or event shall actually be. Fire burns; but whether it shall consume our houses, or cook our food, or keep up the vital warmth of our bodies, or supply the force to carry us along with the speed of a bird, depends on the application of it, and the circumstances under which a directing will chooses that it shall act. There is not an event that happens of which we can be sure that no element has operated in its causation other than the laws and forces of nature, including among them vital energy and even human volition. In the production of every event there is room for the working of subtle

and secret influences, the origin and exercise of which no observation of ours, aided by all the helps that science can furnish, could possibly unmask. In other words, there is room for a controlling but imperceptible providence.

While, however, we maintain that to deny providence in the name, and on the grounds, of physical science is contrary to the true principles of science, inasmuch as the denial is not based on experience, nor can be sustained by any investigation into the manner and limits of physical causation; we must be careful, on the other hand, not to fall into a similar error by pretending that we really know the means by which, or the mode in which, the will of the Almighty God governs the world, and guides events to fulfil His purposes. When we conceive of Him as touching the secret springs of causation here and there, from time to time, to give such tendencies or turns to events as shall make them subserve His design, we conceive of His action under those conditions of Time and Space which are essential to our thought. But He is infinite and eternal, and we do not know what relation Time and Space bear to His thought and His action. In regard to physical laws, it may be a merely verbal dispute whether He be every instant

acting to sustain them, or whether, having been once for all impressed by Him on His creation, they operate thenceforth of themselves. The same may be said of moral laws. There is an undeniable tendency, in the general course of things, in favour of righteousness as against unrighteousness, and that tendency furnishes a strong presumption in behalf of a moral government of the world. But whether it be the result of separate and successive divine acts and interferences, or of a general, automatic law impressed on the world, is a question which it is useless to discuss ; for different to us as these conceptions are, the difference may have its only foundation in the necessary conditions of our thought, and have no corresponding reality in the action of God. In fact, we do not know what the relation of God is to any of the second causes from which events flow, or to any of the laws impressed on the universe ; the points and modes of contact between the infinite and the finite, between the eternal and the temporal, are absolutely unknowable by us.

Hence, instead of conceiving of providence under the form of successive divine interferences, we might substitute the idea of a fore-ordained scheme, adapted from the beginning

to the foreseen course of human will and action. Or we might conceive of the moral and spiritual world as the modern natural philosopher conceives of the physical world; we might imagine it as a mighty and continuous evolution, running parallel to the evolution of the material universe, and so skilfully adjusted in its origin as to fit in harmoniously with the natural order, and in concert with it to work out the Creator's eternal purpose. Yet all the while these several conceptions might really mean the same thing; and the differences between them might indicate nothing else than our inability to conceive of the acts of an eternal Being in any definite relation to time and order of succession.

The whole discussion may be summed up thus :—

If, on the testimony of the voices that whisper to us from nature around, and our hearts within us, we believe that we have a wise and loving Father in heaven, we inevitably go on to believe that He governs the world, and makes the succession of events in it serve His gracious purposes.

But difficulties start up to oppose this belief. First, a moral difficulty. How can He be governing, when events often go so terribly

wrong? Secondly, an intellectual difficulty. How can He be governing, when every event appears to grow by a physical necessity, or natural causation, out of those which preceded it, and we are unable to detect any divine interference with the natural or necessary order?

To the former we reply:—"The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Outward prosperity and adversity are comparatively insignificant. Transient wrong and suffering may be the means of working out permanent right and happiness. God must be wiser than we are. He sees the whole, while we see but a minute part. He has all eternity before Him, in which to bring all things straight, and vindicate His righteousness and goodness toward the children of men.

To the latter we answer:—"The ways of God are in the sea, and His paths in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known." He may be touching the springs of events at myriads of points where it is impossible for us to detect His intervention. Our knowledge of nature is fragmentary and discontinuous; of causation itself we know nothing. Our science discovers physical laws and properties, which

are the conditions of action ; but why one event happens rather than another, we are for the most part ignorant. Our own will can influence the succession of events ; why not God's will much more ? Our conceptions of the divine action are conditioned by Time ; but He is the eternal Lord, to whom all things are present at once, and by a single but everlasting act it may be possible for Him to stamp the impress of His will on all the successions of being for ever.

The objections, then, fail to overthrow the conviction which is inseparable from an enlightened theism, that God's "never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth." We may still believe in our days, as confidently as it was believed in the world's infancy, that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein;" and that "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." By us, no less than by our unscientific forefathers, may consolation be found in the assurance that "God is a very present help in trouble," and "never faileth them that seek Him;" that "His ears are open to their cry," and "He careth for them." Science may have unrolled before our eyes a

splendid panorama of the material universe, and shown us how suns and worlds emerged out of the primeval fire-cloud, and grew into order and beauty ; but neither from the heights nor the depths has it brought us any philosophy so profound, or any encouragement so sweet, as those which are whispered to our hearts in the simple words, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

No. IV.

IS REVELATION POSSIBLE ?

THERE are sceptics and sceptics, some of one kind and some of another. To class them together, and regard them all with the same feelings, would be unjust. With those who wear their scepticism offensively; who are loud, profane, immoral; who hate religion because it condemns vice, and are foes of the Bible because of its witness for the righteous God who requires righteousness in His children; with these it is hard to feel any sympathy. But there are others of a very different character. Amiable, virtuous, good members of society, considerate of the feelings of believers while unable to believe themselves; of these it seems reasonable to hope that they are not far from the kingdom of God.

Of this kind was one who lived in my neighbourhood, and whom I was glad to call my

friend ; a man of cultivated intelligence and kindly disposition, irreproachable in his morals, and known to me for many a generous action. He was not in the habit of making any secret of his scepticism, although he was careful never to parade it, or obtrude it offensively on others who thought differently. If seriously questioned about his opinions, and the grounds on which he maintained them, he would candidly unfold his mind, and explain the difficulties which he found in the way of accepting Christianity ; and it was out of my intercourse with him that the discussion arose which I am about to lay before the reader in the following pages.

It originated in this way. Soon after the news reached England of the death of our great African explorer, David Livingstone, and while his name was in every mouth, I happened to meet my sceptical friend, and our conversation naturally fell on the loss which our country and the world had sustained. We agreed that this remarkable man was even more conspicuous for the rugged simplicity and noble unselfishness of his character, than for his indomitable energy and perseverance ; and I carried my friend's assent with me when I remarked, that the whole of Livingstone's arduous labours were animated by one

supreme motive, the desire to be an instrument in God's hand of raising, both physically and spiritually, the degraded and down-trodden races of Africa. Such a character, I said, seemed to me to be the peculiar product of Christianity. Never had philanthropy reached a height like this, and wrought with such lofty motive and grand self-abnegation, except in the followers of Christ. And then, trusting to my friend's good-temper, I ventured to ask him, if he did not feel that there was some force in the argument, which appealed to this and similar effects of Christianity as evidence in favour of its divine origin. If one might in some measure judge of a religion by its fruits, what fruits could be diviner than these ? How could they be borne by a religion which was rooted in falsehood, or at least had no higher source than human opinions and fancies ?

In making this appeal, I had not reckoned in vain on my friend's candour. With a serious frankness he told me that he was by no means insensible to the force of the argument, in favour of the divine origin of Christianity, to which I had pointed ; and indeed was quite ready to confess, that there were some fruits grown in the soil of this religion which, so far

as he could judge, surpassed in beauty and excellence any that were to be found elsewhere, and disposed him to believe that, of all the religions hitherto professed among mankind, this was the most capable of purifying and elevating the character. "If I were assured," he went on to say, "that among the various religions known to me there really is one, and one only, of divine origin and authority, and were required to pick out that one, I could not hesitate to lay my finger on the religion of Christ. So far I gladly go with you in your estimate of its effects. But when you go on to infer from these effects its divine origin, and to regard them as proving that it came from God, I am unable to keep company with you, much as for several reasons I wish that I could do so. My inability to draw this inference, and admit this truth, arises from the conviction which has forced itself upon me, that there cannot be such a thing as a religion of divine origin and authority. To constitute such a religion, there must be a revelation to mankind from the Being whom they worship; and after looking at the matter as carefully and honestly as I can, I have been driven to the conclusion, that revelation is, in the very nature of things, impossible."

It was not practicable for us at the time to prolong our conversation ; but being desirous of learning in what way my friend had reached this strange conclusion, I made an appointment with him to talk over the matter at our leisure.

While waiting for the day we had fixed, my mind frequently returned to the subject ; and the more I thought about it, the plainer it appeared to me that there was a very serious ambiguity lurking in the statement, that revelation is impossible. Of course, if the existence of God were absolutely denied, the statement became plain enough, and was an inevitable consequence of that denial. Atheism and revelation necessarily exclude each other. There can be no revelation, when there is no one to make it. But that, I was sure, could not be my friend's position. He knew, as well as I did, that however difficult it may be to prove to an objector the existence of God, to disprove it is absolutely impossible. The sceptic may say, "I have searched and cannot find Him;" he may go farther and argue, that we have no faculties whereby God can be found ; but between this and the conclusion that there is no God the gap is one which no logic can bridge over. When, therefore, the impos-

sibility of revelation is intelligibly maintained, it must be on the supposition that, for aught we know, there may be a God. My friend must have meant that God, granting Him to exist, cannot make a revelation to mankind.

But here the ambiguity arose. A revelation is an unveiling, a manifestation, a communication of ideas, of knowledge. Was it meant absolutely that no idea, no information, no elements of knowledge, can pass from an infinite mind to a finite one; or, at least, that between the divine mind and the human an impassable barrier exists, across which no communication is possible? Or was it only intended to affirm that man cannot know that any ideas, any thoughts, present to his consciousness came to him from God; that even if, in fact, they were communicated to him by God, still he could never have any certitude of their divine origin, never be able to trace them beyond and outside himself? These were obviously very different affirmations. According to the former, man is shut up to himself, and no communications from God can ever enter into his thought. According to the latter, communications from God may possibly enter his mind, and be incorporated with his consciousness; only, if they do come to him and

become part of his thought, he cannot know their origin, nor distinguish them from the products of his own mind.

Accordingly, when we met for our proposed conversation, I mentioned to my friend the ambiguity which I found in his proposition, and begged him to begin by defining clearly in which sense he maintained it. As I anticipated, what he intended to affirm was the impossibility of our being conscious of receiving a revelation from God.

"As to its being possible," he said, "for God to make communications of any kind to our minds, I neither affirm nor deny anything, because I am unable to conceive of God at all, and therefore cannot pretend to know what possibilities of action may lie before His choice. If I were persuaded, with you, that there is a Being of infinite power and intelligence, by whose will man came into existence, and is upheld in the exercise of his various faculties, I should, no doubt, deem it absurd to deny to such a Being the power of touching the springs of thought and emotion in His creature, so as to excite any trains of ideas and feelings which He might please to set in motion. I allow that the very conception of God as a personal Creator and Ruler seems to

carry that power along with it, as an inseparable attribute.

"But whether that be a correct conception of God ; or whether it would be truer to conceive of Him as an impersonal force, acting invariably according to mechanical laws ; or whether the name God be anything more than a poetical figment, without any corresponding reality ; I confess myself unable to form an opinion. The matter appears to me to lie entirely beyond the grasp of my faculties ; my mind is a blank in regard to it. It is not of what God can do that I speak, but of what we can know. Here only I feel firm ground under me. What our own faculties are, and what the channels are by which knowledge can enter our minds, we can ascertain by self-examination. And it is an examination of this kind, conducted as accurately and conscientiously as I am able to conduct it, that has led me to the conclusion, that even should a revelation come to us from God, we should be entirely incapable of knowing it to be a revelation from Him."

For this explanation I thanked my friend, and said that I thought I now understood the exact position he intended to maintain. Was it not this ? Supposing, for the sake of argument, that there is a God, a personal, living

God, who made us and cares for us, and has access to our minds ; and supposing also that He is pleased to act upon our minds, and impart ideas to them, and make what is commonly called a revelation to us ; still that it would be impossible for us, owing to the constitution of our receptive faculties, to trace back those ideas, that revelation, to their source in God, or to acquire any certitude that it was He who had communicated them to us.

He allowed that this was a correct statement of his meaning ; and then, at my request, went on to explain the grounds on which he asserted our incapacity to know any revelation whatever to be a revelation. They were in substance as follows.

“ It is easy,” he said, “ to talk in a general way of our receiving communications from without, and being able to discern from whence they come to us. But when the person from whom they purport to issue is both unseen and unknown, you will, if you proceed accurately according to the strict laws of induction, find yourself at a loss how to trace those communications to their real origin.

“ There are only two ways in which any conceivable revelation can be presented to our

apprehension; it must come either direct to the mind, or through the organs of sense.

"Suppose it to come direct to your mind. In that case your earliest knowledge of it will be your consciousness of it in your thoughts. You find yourself thinking it; it is only as your thought, your idea, that you know it at all; from your own thought you cannot disentangle it. How you came to think it, you cannot possibly know; it cannot tell you anything about itself, in addition to your own thought about it: whether it sprang up of itself in your mind, or were excited or infused from without, on the question of its origin it can give you no information. To assert, therefore, that it came to you from God would be to invent an hypothesis which is utterly incapable of verification.

"Or suppose that the revelation is presented to you through your organs of sense. A voice strikes on your ear, or a visible phenomenon is exhibited to your eye. That is all you are conscious of; a sensation, an impression on your senses, nothing more. What this means, or what caused it, can only be a matter of inference, of guess, on your part. The impression which you experience may be an illusive one, for aught you know, like the impressions expe-

rienced in hallucinations or dreams. Or if it have a cause in some reality outside you, what that cause is you cannot ascertain ; because your only source of information about it is your own consciousness, and that can tell you nothing beyond the fact that you feel a certain impression on your senses. To make a leap from your experience of a certain sensation, to the conclusion that the sensation was caused by the voice or finger of some invisible, unknown Being, whom you call God, is obviously to travel altogether beyond the limits of ascertained fact, and to invent an arbitrary explanation of which no rational proof can be given.

“ Yet besides these two ways, either direct to the mind, or through the organs of sense, there is no other by which a revelation can be conceived to be first brought into contact with the human mind. And it is, of course, the first presentation of it that is the essential point to be examined. It may reach you through a series of persons, who have handed it on from one to another ; but to ascertain its reality you must trace it back to the first in the series, and examine if he had any certitude that it came to him from God. If the proof fails there, the chain of evidence breaks down at its first link. That it does, and must, so break down, I think

I have rigorously demonstrated. And if you have followed the argument, you will understand now why I hold that no religion whatever, not even the one which seems to me of the most salutary character, and most engages my sympathies, can ever be proved to be of divine origin, or based upon a revelation from above."

Such was my friend's defence of his position. I have reproduced it here as faithfully as I can, because I feel that those who, like myself, refuse to accept it as conclusive, are at least bound to face it fairly, and candidly allow it whatever force it can justly claim.

Its fault seemed to me to lie, not in any defect of coherence in the reasoning, but in its want of pertinency to the question really at issue. The argument was incontrovertible, so far as it went; but it did not touch the vital point. What it had shown was only this; that if we attempt to prove a revelation rigorously, by arguments addressed to the logical understanding alone, we shall fail, and find ourselves arrested at a point beyond which such arguments are not able to carry us. That, probably, is true enough, and always will be true in our present stage of existence. But the failure of this particular kind of proof does not settle

the question. There may be another kind of evidence, and another faculty in us to receive and appreciate it. This is what my friend had entirely left out of sight, and yet the stress of the controversy lies precisely here.

It is certain that our whole mental constitution is not summed up in the logical understanding. We are conscious of having in us a faculty of a very different kind,—an intuitive faculty, capable of discerning spiritual things, and being thrilled by spiritual emotions. It is this alone that makes religion possible for us. If we possessed not this, it would be as idle to talk to us of God and His truth, as to discourse of music to the deaf, or of light to the blind. True it is, that this sacred faculty may be paralyzed, or cease to act; unnatural repression, worldliness, selfishness, vice, may blunt its perceptiveness, and render it insensible to the divine voice. But it is part of our nature nevertheless; and when cultivated by humility, purity, and conscientious devotion to the law of duty, it acquires strength and activity, and becomes the organ whereby we recognize and are conscious of God. To this faculty His revelation of Himself speaks, and by this its divineness is discerned. Theulti-

mate proof of revelation to the individual soul,—the proof which supplies what is defective in the logical argument,—is the verdict pronounced in its favour by this intuitive faculty within us.

Of course, the objection may be urged that this verdict may be false, and that in trusting to our spiritual intuition we may be placing reliance on a mere illusion. So it may be said of all our other faculties, and the information which they convey to us ; they may be illusory, and often are so when disordered by disease. Yet we trust them, and are obliged to trust them ; for unless we trust them, knowledge of any kind whatever is impossible. Only let the spiritual faculty be kept healthy and bright by moral and religious culture, and there can be no reason why we should not trust it within its proper sphere, as much as we trust our senses, our memory, and our logical intellect.

With these ideas in my mind, I told my friend that I did not quarrel with his argument so much as with its application. I was ready to concede that he had forcibly shown the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of logically proving the divine origin of an alleged revelation ; but so far was I from being

convinced that we have no practical means of knowing when God speaks to us, that he must excuse me for calling his argument entirely irrelevant to the real question in debate, and holding that it left the grounds of my faith in Christianity quite untouched.

At this he was evidently surprised, and said that, as a candid seeker after truth, he would be much obliged if I would point out clearly what fault I found in his method of dealing with the subject.

To this I replied, that arguments which manifestly proved too much always wore a very suspicious aspect in my eyes; and when, by an apparently irresistible progress, they at last landed the reasoner in conclusions which are at variance with the universal instincts and convictions of mankind, I had no doubt left that somehow they had gone wrong, and were either vitiated by some fallacy, or were inapplicable to the subject in hand. "This," I said, "is the case with your argument. It proves too much, and leads to a denial of the universal convictions on which all men act habitually."

"How so?" he asked.

"While I am listening to you," I replied, "I cannot for a moment doubt that it is really

you who are speaking to me, and that the ideas which are presented to my mind are your ideas, not my own. You reveal your thoughts to me, and you do it in such a way that I have no difficulty in tracing the revelation to you, and being practically certain that it proceeds from you. But this very thing which you are doing, without any difficulty or effort, you deny that God is able to do. While you freely, and with perfect assurance of your ability to do it, convey to me thoughts and ideas of your own, so that I know them without any doubt to be yours; you are at the same time arguing that it is impossible for Him who fashioned my nature, and holds it in His hand, to enable me to know that He is speaking to me. You can do it, God cannot! You reverse the saying that has hitherto seemed incontestible, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God;' and, if your argument is worth anything, we must henceforth say, 'That which is possible with men is impossible with God.' Must you not allow that I have reason to be suspicious of a demonstration, which leads straight to such an absurd result?

"Besides," I went on to say, "your argument, if it proves anything, proves much more

than the particular conclusion which you have used it to establish. It cannot stop short at its denial of our ability to know that a revelation comes from God. It goes much further; indeed, it has no goal short of universal scepticism. Do you not see that, if I accept it as valid, I shall have no grounds left for believing that it is you to whom I have been listening, or even for believing in your existence at all? As I seem to myself to sit here, looking at you and hearing your voice, I am merely conscious of certain impressions made on my organs of sense; or, to speak perhaps more accurately, of certain sensations, which seem to me to come through my organs of sense. That is all the proof I have of your being there, or even of your existing at all. That proof, you tell me, is no proof at all. My sensations are my sensations, nothing more. They cannot inform me whence they originated, or what they mean. My reference of them to you as their cause is but an inference, a guess, of my own, incapable of any possible verification. I cannot acquire any certainty about their origin, nor be sure that they have any origin outside myself. Moreover, exactly the same difficulty lies in the way of my knowing, that of all the things

which seem to exist in the world around me any single one has any existence whatever, except as a sensation of my own consciousness. Such is the inevitable effect of your logic! I fancied that I knew you, and was hearing you discourse; but if I yield myself to your argument, you and the whole universe vanish from my knowledge, and I am left absolutely alone with my own consciousness!"

As my friend made no reply, and seemed willing to listen, I urged him to consider seriously whether in the grand, the all-important question before us, man's capacity to know anything of God, it was possible that the yearnings of our hearts should be satisfied, or set at rest, by the mere logical puzzle which he had been putting before me. "Suppose, if you please," I said, "that no flaw can be detected in the links of which your argument is framed, and that, as far as it goes, it is logically valid. What then? It does not cover the whole ground, but only a small part of it, over which the debate extends; it leaves entirely out of consideration the spiritual side of human nature, with its rich dowry of faculties, perceptions, and aspirations. With what reason can the logical understanding arrogate to itself the right to regulate practically the entire domain

of human belief and conduct, when even within its own province it cannot stir a step, nor reach a single conclusion, without relying on convictions of which no proof can be drawn out by its methods, and for which it is indebted to the very consciousness whose voice you are distrusting ? If you sit down and postpone action till you have reduced life to logical formulas, and rigorously reasoned out your position in the universe, and the duties which emerge from it, you will resemble the rustic waiting on the river's bank for the stream to run dry, and life will be gone before you have made up your mind how you ought to live. Such would be the inevitable consequence of the principle for which you are contending, did not your good sense, in every other province of conduct except religion, laugh it out of the field. For your argument comes to this, that outside yourself, outside the four corners of your own consciousness, nothing can be proved to exist. If so, how can you know of any relations binding you to other beings, or of any duties to which such relations give birth ?

“ You tell me that you would be glad to believe as I do, but that before you can trust yourself to a revelation that professes to have

come from heaven, before you can feel safe in submitting your life to its authority, or building your hopes on its promises, you must have strict, logical demonstration of its having really come forth from God.

"I reply, use your reason reasonably, and see if it will not lead you a good part of the way towards belief; so far, indeed, that the rest may be accomplished by that spiritual intuition, which sees clearly where reason is only able to grope in the dark.

"Slave as you profess to be to your logic, you know well enough that you are a being of wonderful and exquisite constitution; that you are endowed with personality, will, reason; with a conscience, that witnesses for the authority of a moral law; and a spiritual faculty, which can conceive of God, can reverence and worship Him. You know also that, being thus constituted, you dwell, with millions of others like yourself, in a complex and glorious universe, filled with order and life and beauty. Can your logic inform you whence you yourself, and these your fellow-men, and this magnificent universe, originated; or explain to you what they all mean? You know that it cannot. You ask it in vain, Whence? Why? Whither? It is dumb, and leaves you helpless and hopeless.

"But an answer has come, you know not from what quarter. It tells you of an eternal, almighty, all-wise, and good Being, whose handiwork this wonderful universe is, and who has formed you and your fellow-men in His own likeness, and made you moral and spiritual beings, that you may know and love Him, and find everlasting life in His favour. Here, at least, is an offered solution of the mystery. If it be not perfect, it is better than none; and you had none before. Take it, then, provisionally, as an hypothesis, and try if it will not, on the whole, fit in with the facts, and satisfy the demand which they excite in your mind. Does not the blank mystery of being begin to clear up before it, the oppression of hopeless doubt to pass away? Do you not catch a glimmer of reason in things, where you could discern no reason before? Does not nature assume to your eyes a transfigured appearance, as soon as divine intelligence and purpose are let in, and allowed to shine through all its kingdoms? Does not the marvellous intellectual and spiritual constitution of man cease now to be an inexplicable anomaly, and take its place in the order of a divinely constructed world? Is not human history less of a riddle, when you begin to trace in

it God's education of mankind, through gradual communications of the knowledge of Himself?

"I do not say that you will find no difficulties, no obscurities, left. But remember, that every correspondence between the facts and the offered explanation of them, every lightening by it of the oppressive mystery of existence, begets an increase of probability that the explanation is the true one. I know that its truth cannot be formally demonstrated. But that, I would urge, is really of little consequence, because we certainly do not live by logical demonstrations; and least of all, in the concerns of the highest, the peculiarly human part of our personality. What devout and truth-seeking souls have experienced, and what I think you will yourself experience if you tread in their steps, is this: that taking the solution, thus shown by reason itself to be probable, and fairly bringing it to the test of their hearts, they have found it so grow into, and root itself in, both the intellectual and spiritual parts of their nature, as to enable them to dispense with demonstration, because intuitively they feel and perceive it to be true.

"Thus it is that the probabilities, which the understanding can estimate, prepare the way for that instinctive conviction, that spiritual

certainty, which is essential to genuine religious feeling, and in the absence of which religion, if it existed at all, would be but a matter of calculation and prudence, not of worship, devotion, and love. Led by these probabilities towards the shrine of the invisible, the devout soul enters and beholds the glory of God, bows down, and adores. And then, from the heights and the depths; from around and within; from the order and harmony of the universe; from the moral law stamped on the conscience; from the matchless story of Christ; from the pages of the Bible, glowing with truths that search and cleanse the heart; from myriads of saintly witnesses, who through faith have lived nobly and died in peace and hope; from all quarters will there come, thronging together and gathering strength by their concert, countless corroborations and illustrations of the belief, that God has indeed revealed Himself to mankind, and that truly to know Him is eternal life."

No. V.

HEAD OR HEART THE BEST JUDGE
OF THE BIBLE ?

THE question which I have undertaken to discuss in this paper is no doubt a very old one; but circumstances having recently led me to think a good deal about it, and given it a fresh interest to my mind, I have thought it might be useful to set down the line my meditations took, and the conclusion to which they led me, in the hope that what I have to say will furnish help to some who may have been alarmed by the hard things that are continually being said and written against the Bible.

Owing to causes which need not be mentioned here, I had been carefully reading a large number of those publications of all kinds and sizes, from a stout volume to a fly-sheet, from a lecture to a newspaper paragraph, of which the

professed object is to put people out of conceit with the Bible, and force them to acknowledge that they have fallen into a grievous mistake in trusting it as their guide in religion. I cannot say that I found my reading very pleasant, or felt much the better for it; but it was not without an interest of its own, and it certainly kept my attention on the stretch. Clever and acute many of the writers evidently were, and not a few of them appeared to be really well-read, and even learned; their arguments for the most part were clearly put, and sometimes were enlivened by sarcasms levelled at the venerable object of their attack, or the people who esteemed and defended it. On the whole, the impression made on me was that these were opponents who were in earnest and hit hard, and were not to be treated with indifference by those who cared about the Bible, and wished it to retain its place of honour amongst us.

What struck me most in all this literature was the general absence of any sympathy with the Bible, any consciousness that the sacred Book of Christendom appeals to the heart, on subjects of the highest interest to every human being. This was a phenomenon which contrasted in the strongest way with my previous

experience. The course of my life had brought me into close contact with a large number of excellent Christian people, whose religion was the principle and guide of their conduct, and who found in the Bible the support and nutriment of their religion. They were no critics. Of the curious and difficult questions raised by modern criticism, respecting the origin and structure of the Bible, they were ignorant; of the objections urged against the Bible by sceptics they took little heed. They did not examine the Book critically, but they used it practically. They fed on its truths, and felt themselves the better for them. Out of its pages they drew wisdom, comfort, and strength; and they were satisfied.

Not that they were altogether ignorant that many difficulties have been found in the Bible, and many objections urged against the sufficiency of the proof for its divine authority, and the correctness of one and another of its statements. But these things did not much arrest their attention, or seem to concern them materially. My friends had the witness in themselves. That they got good, infinite good, out of the Bible, they were sure. It was daily cleansing their hearts, purifying the springs of their life, making the presence of God a reality

to them. To feel this was, practically, enough for them. There might be difficulties, but what could they weigh against such an inward testimony? Learned men might examine, and criticize, and argue about the Bible; they were content to believe in it, and to live by it.

No doubt to many, this putting aside of difficulties, and going on with undisturbed assurance as if they did not exist, will seem irrational and childish. Is it not to abdicate the seat of reason, and retire to dwell with credulity and superstition? Would it not be more manly to face the difficulty when once it is suggested; to hunt it down, and drag it into light, and refuse all compromise, and hold belief in suspense until the truth shall be thoroughly ascertained? Is there not a hollowness, an insincerity, in the faith which is built up over a concealed difficulty,—a difficulty which the mind knows to exist, but refuses to examine? Much of this kind might be urged, and the conduct of these honest, but uncritical Christians might easily be made to appear very ridiculous.

Yet a good deal might also be said in favour of their reasonableness. It was no new faith they were accepting, no new book they were trusting. The faith had existed for ages, had

created Christendom, had regenerated human life. The Book had been the tried support and teacher of sixty generations of the holiest and best of men. These facts my friends knew ; and when in this Book, thus authenticated to them, and stamped with this seal of its power and worth, they too found by experience what their souls wanted for their cleansing and strengthening, could they be blamed for feeling quite satisfied, and thinking it of comparatively little consequence whether they, or any one else, could clear up all the difficulties, or answer all the objections ?

Let this way of looking at the matter be tested by a homely illustration.

I am fond of brightness and warmth, and accustomed to revel in the clear sunshine. Well, suppose that one fine day I am accosted by a learned-looking man, with a long telescope under his arm, who tells me that mankind have been in grievous error in their irrational admiration of the great luminary, and warns me against rejoicing any longer in its glorious light. When I wonderingly ask, why? he goes on to assure me that he has been making a careful survey of its face with his powerful instrument, and has discovered it to be blemished by many ugly spots. Should I not be justified in replying, that possibly the

fact might be as he stated ; but I did not see any reason why I should set to work to verify it, or care much about it, should it be true. The sun, spotted or not, lighted and warmed and cheered me ; and as all his discoveries were unable to alter that fact, he must excuse me if I went on admiring and rejoicing in the majestic orb just as before.

It was much in the same way that my worthy friends acted, in regard to critical difficulties about the authority and contents of the Bible. They put them aside and practically ignored them, which was certainly a very uncritical method of dealing with them. But they did it on this ground ; that with the convincing witness of experience to the divineness of the sacred Book, it seemed needless to trouble themselves about the faults which learned men, armed with all the apparatus of criticism, might claim to have discovered in its pages.

But now, in the sceptical literature that I had been recently examining, I found the strongest contrast to this illustration of what may be called the vital affinity between the Bible and the soul that seeks after God. From these books I could not have gathered, that the Bible had a single word to say to the hearts and consciences of the writers. Where my old

friends had found springs of living waters, and pastures of wholesome food, these seemed to discern nothing but a dry, barren waste. The pages, to the one so sacred and fruitful, to the others were but as a hunting-ground, in which it was their sole business to start and chase down apparent errors and defects. Keen of scent and quick of eye for any supposed blunder, these literary detectives followed on its track, with the cool remorselessness of a policeman in pursuit of a suspected criminal. No analyst, with a flagrant case of adulteration in hand, could be less sympathizing, less tender, than were these critics in their teasing and torturing the text of the Bible, to prove it impure and to convict it of unwholesomeness. Never could I perceive in their work any signs of spiritual emotion, awakened by the solemnity of the subjects they were handling; never any recognition of the moral beauty which irradiates the sacred volume, or of the power of its appeals to the conscience, or of the sweetness of the rest which it offers to the weary longings of the soul. Had they been mere reasoning machines, pieces of insensible mechanism for grinding out critical results, and destitute of all the diviner parts of human nature, they could not have prosecuted their task in a colder, sterner

temper. Whatever they might be on other occasions, or in other relations, here they showed themselves simply as men of hard, narrow heads, who judged the Bible and passed sentence on it from the side of the intellect alone, and listened to no plea from the heart in mitigation of the verdict.

This contrast to my uncritical friends' manner of dealing with the Bible set me on reflecting, that there are two very different ways of judging that wonderful Book,—two ways corresponding to two distinct faculties of our nature. For shortness sake I call these, judging by the head, and judging by the heart. By the head I mean the reasoning, arguing, criticizing faculty,—the logical understanding, which coldly discusses the truth or falsehood of a statement, and demands plain, positive demonstration as the condition of accepting it. Prove it, is the cry of the head, when any proposition is submitted to it; prove it by undeniable evidence, by evidence which overpowers and gets rid of all doubts, by evidence of the same kind and cogency as that on which the truths of science rest. By the heart I mean a very different faculty from this; a wider, less definable, more mysterious faculty; what may be called the spiritual faculty, the

faculty which is the seat of all those ideas, emotions, and affections which we associate with religion. The voice of the conscience, the sense of sin, the admiration of moral excellence, the yearning after an unseen God, the need of trust and worship,—these are rooted in this mysterious faculty, by virtue of which we are human beings and not mere reasoning animals. And of this faculty the demand is very different from that of the other. It feels rather than reasons. Its judgments are more intuitive, or instinctive, than logical. It does not ask, Can the doctrine be rigorously proved? but, Does it speak with power to man's soul? does it find a response in his spirit? does it meet the secret wants of his higher nature? does it bring purity, peace, and strength to his heart? When such questions are experimentally answered in the affirmative, the spiritual faculty is satisfied; it believes and trusts, in the conviction that the doctrine which thus approves itself must be true and divine.

Now it was plain to me that both these faculties need to be exercised continually, in their proper provinces, and in accordance with their respective characters, if we would live full, complete lives, worthy of human beings. Were we to listen to nothing but the head, life

would become intolerable ; our hearts would be starved ; we should rob ourselves of all the tender grace and soft beauty that grow in the fruitful soil of the affections, of all the heroism and moral glory that spring from the conscience and the sense of duty and honour. If, on the other hand, we followed the dictates of the heart alone, reason would be dethroned within us ; we should lose our stability, and become creatures of fitful, irregular impulse, and fall victims to credulity and superstition. And it was equally plain that in the great domain of religion, whether for the settlement of belief, or the application of it to conduct, both these faculties must be called into exercise. The Bible could be no exception to this rule, when we would be fair and thorough in our judgment of it. It appeals both to head and to heart, to reason and to feeling, to the understanding and to the spirit ; and to both these faculties it needs to approve itself.

So far all seemed clear, but at this point perplexity began. Suppose that in any case, in which a definite judgment was necessary for the guidance of conduct, these faculties disagreed, and led to widely different practical conclusions. That was at least conceivable.

Where the head had detected no flaw, and therefore declared itself satisfied, the heart might have found no nourishment, and turned away famished and despairing. What tempted, weary soul could derive help and refreshment from the most faultless demonstrations of science? On the other hand, the voice to which the heart thrilled with hope and joy might appear to the critical intellect to be untrustworthy, for want of sufficient logical demonstration of its truth, or even false because it seemed to be inconsistent with itself in some of its utterances, or to run counter to undeniable facts. In the very controversy before me this was apparently the case. With my old friends the Bible had thoroughly approved itself to their hearts, and on that ground they had yielded it a loyal allegiance, and submitted their lives to its authority with entire conviction of its right to their obedience. But here were men of undoubted acuteness and intelligence, who after arraigning the Bible at the bar of the intellect, and subjecting its claims to the severest critical examination, decided that it had no just title to their reverence and submission, because the craving of their logical faculty for exact and rigorous proof of its divineness remained unsatisfied. In the former the heart had arrived

at one conclusion, in the latter the head had reached the opposite. I knew, moreover, that even in the same individual such a variance between these faculties had been a fact of actual experience. I had heard of sceptics who wished to believe, but could not; who envied the faith and hope of the Christian, but were unable to share it; whose yearning hearts confessed the beauty of religion, but whose critical heads compelled them to pronounce it an unsubstantial dream.

Here, then, I was brought face to face with the question, which of the two faculties, Head or Heart, is on the whole the most competent and trustworthy judge of the claims of the Bible, and the best entitled to be listened to, in case of disagreement.

It was plain to me that this question, when considered in all its bearings, is by no means a simple or easy one.

The belief that the Bible records or conveys a revelation from God implies the truth of two preliminary propositions. First, that there is a God to make a revelation; and secondly, that supposing Him to make one, we are capable of discerning that it really proceeds from Him. When these are established, it remains to be proved that the Bible bears convincing marks

of being the word, not of man only, but also of God Himself.*

Now, not to insist on the difficulty of drawing out a strictly logical proof that God is really speaking to us in the Bible, even when the two preliminary propositions are taken for granted, it is certain that neither of those propositions is capable of being demonstrated by any process of purely argumentative reasoning. I say "certain" without hesitation or reserve, because this is proved by the whole course of human thought since men began to reason about unseen things. If a man has no intuitive or instinctive conviction of God, it is impossible to force him by mere logical argument to admit the existence of God. If a man feels no divineness in a revelation, he cannot be compelled by any irresistible demonstration to believe that it came from an unseen God. We may array probabilities before him; we may drive him into dilemmas; we may show him that his scepticism affords no satisfactory or tenable solution of the problems of existence; but so long as he takes his stand on the decisions of the logical understanding, and refuses to advance a step beyond them, we can never constrain him to believe in the reality of God and

revelation. Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.

But while the logical faculty, the head, stumbles over difficulties, and fails to discern sufficient proof, the spiritual faculty, the heart, outruns the halting intellect, perceives by a spiritual intuition, believes, and worships. And the final question is, Is it to be trusted? Is the spiritual faculty a true organ, in its own sphere, of spiritual knowledge; or are its perceptions illusive, its verdicts false? Can it see where the logical understanding is blind? Can it bridge over for us the gap between the sensible and the spiritual, on the border of which the mere reasoning faculty stands helpless? Can we through it arrive at a well-founded conviction of spiritual realities, the existence of which cannot be demonstrated by logical proof?

That is the root-question; and it seemed to me, that when the controversy is brought down to this point, no argument can carry it further. It must be left for each person to determine it instinctively for himself. Whoever is not conscious of possessing any spiritual faculty, and knows nothing of religious emotion in his own experience, will be almost sure to decide against the validity of

the verdicts of the spiritual faculty in others, because for him they have no meaning, no existence. But for those whose hearts are stirred to their depths by the voice of God, whose inner eye recognizes His presence, and the pulses of whose souls beat in joyful unison with His truth, further demonstration is useless. They feel; they see; and that is enough for them. They have the witness in themselves; and the testimony of their senses to the material world is not clearer nor surer.

Such was the line that my reflections took. It happened, while I was thinking the matter over, that a course of lectures was announced in the neighbourhood by a very able advocate of scepticism. His programme was as follows:—

“ Religion a matter only of individual feeling and imagination. Revelation impossible. The Bible tried by reason, and proved merely human. Its miracles unsupported by evidence, and refuted by science. Exposure of its errors and superstitions. The senses the only sources of real knowledge. Reason the sole guide of life.”

“ Thorough-going indeed!” I exclaimed. “ The man knows what he is about, and goes to the root of the matter. He is aware that if he once lets in the spiritual faculty, as

having any voice in the recognition of truth, and the determination of belief, it is likely to go hard with his argument. So he stops up that inlet of divine knowledge, and at a stroke condemns us to invincible ignorance of everything that lies beyond the cognizance of the senses. To get rid of the Bible he gets rid of God!"

I was unable to attend these lectures myself, but, feeling interested about them, and being anxious to learn what impression they were making, I was glad to discover that one of my friends, in whose judgment I had confidence, had determined to hear them for himself. He was a man of average culture, more remarkable for sterling good sense than for any controversial gifts or extensive learning; and I had long esteemed him greatly for his practical piety, which, drawing its continual nourishment from the Bible, animated his conduct, and made his whole life beautiful with goodness. If among all my acquaintances I had picked out the one whose religion was the most thoroughly real and operative, ingrained in the very texture of his being, and exerting a purifying influence over all his dealings, upon him my choice would certainly have rested. With this knowledge of his attainments and

character, it seemed to me that there could not be a better person, in whom experimentally to try the cause, *Head versus Heart*, which was occupying my attention. I was sure that he would hear many things that would be quite new to him, and would be assailed by numerous arguments, of which he could perceive the force without being able to reply to them ; and that, in employing the resources of learning and logic and rhetorical artifice, the lecturer would be very much his master. Yet I could not feel so much as the very faintest and most shadowy doubt of the result. I should as soon have expected a fortress to be stormed by a blaze of fireworks, as my friend's rooted convictions to be shaken by any of the reasonings or invectives that were likely to be brought against them. So I waited for the result with interest, but without fear.

The lectures came to an end, but before I had an opportunity of hearing my friend's account of them I fell in with a young acquaintance, who had also been attracted to them, and was evidently very strongly impressed. He was a student of much promise, who had already distinguished himself in his classes, and bade fair to run a successful career. The turn of his mind was scientific and logical;

he had a quick eye for a weak point in an argument, and a lively scorn for a detected fallacy. Perhaps there was rather too much of intellectual self-sufficiency about him to please me; but he was young and inexperienced, and could scarcely be expected to know how much deeper the stream of human life ran than his little plummet could sound.

“Ah!” he said, when he met me, “you should have seen what short work our lecturer made with the old-fashioned notions of religion. I had no idea the case of the Bible was so weak. It was a treat to watch his strokes come thundering down on the things which people have been taking for granted, as sacred truths never to be questioned, and reduce them to shapeless fragments. If you made a stand for some point of the old creed, he had you in a corner directly. He would not let you assume this and that and the other, as our orthodox champions are accustomed to do; he required you to prove everything logically, and you soon found out that you could not. Such errors, too, he pointed out in the Bible, such absurd improbabilities and unscientific ideas! One really is forced to give up a book, which cuts up so badly under critical investigation. For my part I am beginning to think that all we

are accustomed to hear in church will soon be exploded, and will vanish away like a worn-out fable before the spread of real knowledge and sound philosophy."

I saw that to argue with him would be useless; the faculty which recognizes and responds to the voice of God lay dormant within him. He seemed to me to be an illustration of the saying, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." So I was content to rejoin that perhaps, as he grew older, and learnt more of the inward mystery and struggle of our being, he would discover that there was another side to the great question ; at present I would only ask, whether these new views did not seem to him to rob human life of much of its dignity and grace, and to reduce it to a lower, darker, less hopeful thing than we had been accustomed to deem it. "Oh ! as to that," he replied, "he had not thought of it, nor did he see any use in thinking of it. Truth was truth, and if it did lower us in our own conceit, that could not be helped." And so we parted.

At last my opportunity came, and I sat down to a long, serious talk with my friend. I opened the subject by telling him of the impression

made on the young student. He was not surprised, he said. On the lecturer's own ground, and assuming that to be the only ground on which the controversy could be argued out, he considered that the conclusion was almost inevitable; for when religious ideas were required to justify themselves to the intellect, by the same kind of evidence as that by which a scientific theory is established, they could scarcely help failing, and being ignominiously put out of court.

This remark struck me, for it showed that he had been led to draw the same distinction that I had been making, between the provinces of the head and the heart in forming a judgment upon religious questions. It was with some eagerness, therefore, that I begged him to tell me candidly how his own mind had been impressed by the lecturer's arguments.

He looked grave, and paused for an instant before he replied, that the general effect of the discussion had certainly been to leave a strong impression on his mind. And it was this, that matters of religious faith do not admit of rigorous logical demonstration: that the various arguments by which theism and revelation are supported do not amount to absolute proof, nor

dispose of every objection that the intellect can raise; and that if we were to allow no weight to the testimony of the spiritual faculty within us, and were to postpone our belief in God and His truth until every difficulty is solved to the satisfaction of the critical understanding, we should most probably remain atheists to the end of our days.

But you were not shaken in your faith, I asked, by being brought to acknowledge that there are difficulties in the logical proof of religious truth, which, so far as we can at present see, are not capable of being cleared up to the entire satisfaction of the intellect?

"Not for a single moment," was his answer; "the experience of my spiritual consciousness saved me. Had it not been for that, it might perhaps have fared badly with some of my most cherished convictions. For I cannot conceal that many speculative difficulties were for the first time brought to my notice, which I was, and still am, quite unable to see my way through; and many things in the Bible were exhibited to me in a light that made them extremely perplexing. Under the lecturer's remorseless logic and analysis the old arguments which had formerly satisfied my mind seemed to be crumbling away, and new

difficulties started up which I had never suspected before. But all the while I was never disturbed by the smallest doubt of the safety of my faith. That was far out of the reach of any of his weapons, however vigorously they slashed and hewed. I felt as if I were standing on a solid rock, while a hailstorm was rattling about my ears, and blinding my eyes. No fear of the ground sinking under me, for all the noise and the pelting ! As the discussion rolled on with an insolent triumph, it grew plainer and plainer to me, that the citadel of my faith is in the centre of my own heart. There I had heard the voice of God, and felt the breath of His vivifying Spirit. There the Bible had approved itself to me as the organ of a divine revelation, by healing my disorders, reconciling my discords, and bringing me into conscious fellowship with the Father of spirits. What matters it, I said to myself, that my intellect is unable entirely to explain and justify the mystery of this ? My faith rests on the firm ground of actual experience, experience as real to my spiritual perception as material objects are to my bodily senses ; and I can no more doubt that God is speaking to me in His word, than I can doubt the laws of motion, or the axioms of geometry.”

He was silent for a few instants, and then resumed in a lighter tone.

“ While the lecturer was busy with his confident demonstration, that all our religious beliefs are mere illusions, destitute of any foundation in external, objective realities, an odd scene rose before my imagination. I fancied I was listening to a professor, who had been blind from his birth, lecturing to an equally blind audience, on the notions of light and colour and pictorial art, held by those who claim the possession of the strange faculty of sight. I imagined in what a ridiculous light he exhibited the pretence of being able to see, whatever might be meant by that term ; with what force he argued that colour was an inconceivable idea, and a picture an impossibility ; and how triumphantly he carried his hearers with him when he appealed to their experience, and asked them to say candidly, if it furnished a single ground for believing that light had any existence, except in the poetical fancies of enthusiasts. To a person who simply had eyes such a lecture could not have appeared fuller of fallacy than the sceptic’s argument did to me, when he laboured to prove that a spiritual perception of divine truth is impossible and inconceivable. To me, such a

perception was a fact of my experience, and argument was as powerless to convince me to the contrary, as it would have been to reason me out of my eyesight."

Here I interposed the remark, that the intellect has a most important, and even necessary, office to perform, in presenting religious ideas satisfactorily to the perception of the spiritual faculty. If it be true, as it undoubtedly is, that the reasoning faculty by itself is not competent to prove absolutely the truth of those ideas, or to clear up all the difficulties that attach to them; yet it is able to lead a considerable way towards belief in them, by showing the probabilities in their favour, and their adaptation to the highest wants of our nature. And this it must do, to furnish a starting-point for the spiritual faculty to work from, with security and confidence. For it is obvious, that if we refused to allow the logical understanding to play any part in the settlement of religious belief, and abandoned ourselves to the guidance of feeling or intuition alone, we should expose ourselves very seriously to the perils of fanaticism and delusion.

"Of course," he replied. "The inward and spiritual faculty, by which we perceive the divineness of God's revelation of Himself, needs

to be assisted and guarded by the intellect, whose special province it is to scrutinize the channels through which the revelation comes, and the forms in which it presents itself, and to show how the known facts of human existence lead up to it, and it fits in with them and explains them. To all that I most heartily assent. But what I mean is this,—that after the intellect has done all that it can, and placed revelation before the spiritual faculty, as on the whole probable, though not demonstrable, nor free from difficulties, it has no right to deny that this latter faculty may then by means of an intuitive perception advance further, and acquire a thorough conviction that the revelation is indeed of God. When the soul, led so far by the intellect, has steadily gazed on the offered revelation, and through contact with it finds itself vibrating throughout all its compass to the recognized voice of God, and filled with an unmistakeable sense of life and strength through feeding on His truth; then I hold it to be utterly irrational to allow the intellect to step in, with an air of supreme authority, and pronounce this experience of the soul to be a delusion, on the ground that it lies outside the sphere of logical demonstration and analysis.

Let the intellect have all honour in its own province ; let it warn the spiritual faculty off unsafe ground, and guard and fence the truths of revelation. But let it remember that there is an inner sphere of religious emotion and experience, the air of which it cannot breathe, the laws of which it cannot reduce into subjection to its own processes. To me the experience of my spiritual consciousness, the action and testimony of this inmost and most sacred faculty in response to the divine voice, is the fact of facts of my being, which no inability of the intellect to account for it, or verify it, can get rid of or refute.

“ I have mentioned one illustration which occurred to me, while I was listening to the lectures, and I will conclude by telling you of another. Suppose I have been for years living on a particular kind of food, which has kept me in health and vigour ; my muscles are strong, my digestion good, my temper cheerful, my habits active ; I have all the marks and signs of being well-nourished. Well, there comes to me an analytical chemist, with his scales and tests and crabbed formulas, and asks to see my food. He macerates and pounds it, dissolves and bakes and boils it, tries it with acids, resolves it into its elements,

weighs its separate components; and then gravely pronounces it to possess no nutritive qualities, and warns me against relying on it to sustain my life. What can I do, but laugh in his face? I do not understand his processes; I cannot put my finger on the point where he has gone wrong; but that he has blundered somewhere, most signally and ridiculously, I myself am the manifest proof. And so I say of the logical demonstration, that there is no such thing as divine truth, on which my spiritual being can be nourished. My soul, consciously enlightened, cleansed, strengthened, gladdened, as it humbly feeds on the truth, is itself to me the irresistible proof that the pretended demonstration has blundered and failed."

Here our conversation ended, leaving me more strongly impressed than ever with the conviction, to which my previous examination of the question had guided me, that when the Bible, received and used as the Word of God, has thoroughly approved itself to the heart as divine, faith finds no serious hindrance in the fact, that there may remain some difficulties in the logical proof of its supernatural origin, which the head is incapable of solving to its own satisfaction. And from the instances that

had come under my notice I felt entitled to draw the conclusion, that the impression made on any one's mind, by intellectual or speculative difficulties about the Bible, will depend very much on the state in which they find him, in regard to personal experience of the power of religion. If he has never felt the living energy of the Word of God, stirring the deeps of his spiritual consciousness; if his heart has never been pierced by its arrows of truth, nor consoled by its messages of grace and love, and has never vibrated in filial response to its revelation of the fatherhood of God; the difficulties inherent in the logical proof of the inspiration of the Bible by the Divine Spirit will be without counterpoise, and will be very likely, as in the case of the young student, to drive him out of his formal and traditionary belief, and compel him to take up his abode in the dreary, barren regions of scepticism. But where there has been a long, loving acquaintance with the Bible, and the heart witnesses clearly and emphatically to the preciousness of its spiritual teaching, as manifested by the experienced results; there, as in my friend's case, the objections and difficulties marshalled against faith by the critical intellect, however threateningly they may advance to

the assault, will find themselves opposed by an impregnable barrier, against which they will dash themselves in vain.

Nor could I doubt that these results are justified by the highest reason. It is no disparagement of them to urge, that the friend of the Bible is too much biassed by his affection, to judge fairly and impartially between the Book which he has learnt to love, and the charges that are brought against it; and that the indifferent critic, who brings nothing but a cold, clear head to his work, is better qualified to form a just opinion, and is therefore entitled to be heard in preference. The vital question is not about the precise magnitude of the difficulties, or the possibility of finding solutions of them which shall entirely satisfy the intellect; but whether, allowing them to exist, and to baffle all attempts completely to clear them up, they have a right to stifle the voice of the heart, and make us distrust its deepest experience. And this is a question, the answer to which lies altogether beyond the function of the mere critic. His stand-point is solely intellectual; the inner voice of the spirit is nothing to him. It is the person who has practically tried the Bible, by surrendering his heart to its influence, and has thereby

learnt through his own experience with what power it speaks to the soul, and what streams of cleansing, healing grace flow from it, such as are to be met with nowhere else,—it is he alone who brings to the great controversy the knowledge which is essential to its decision; he alone who is competent to weigh the difficulties which encompass belief against the witness of the heart in its favour, and to judge whether the Bible, in spite of all that can be alleged against it by the most lynx-eyed and hostile criticism, be not still entitled to his reverence, trust, and love.

No. VI.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM;—ITS PROVINCE
AND LIMITS.

FEW things, perhaps, in the present century have more disturbed the minds of Christian persons, than the results at which learned critics of the Bible profess to have arrived, by means of free inquiry into its origin, structure, and contents. The attacks made in former times, by avowed sceptics, on the sacred Volume were, for the most part, too coarse and indiscriminate, to produce any very serious impression on those who felt religion to be the greatest of realities, and faith in Christ the stay of their souls. Being obviously directed against religion itself, and not merely against the Bible, and being generally accompanied by ridicule and scorn of all that is dearest to the devout heart, such attacks

seemed too clearly to proceed from hatred of righteousness, and consequently of divine truth, to merit much attention. Before anything that was formidable in them could reach and fairly grapple with the intellect, they were condemned by their spirit and temper, and religious persons in general refused to listen, and turned away in disgust and abhorrence.

But the case was altered, when a new generation of critics arose, who with an appearance of impartiality, and even of reverence, ventured to apply to the sacred Scriptures the principles of that modern science of historical criticism, which had attempted, with considerable success, to winnow out the real from the legendary in the early annals of Greece and Rome. Here were men of religious feeling and pure life, learned and conscientious, believers in God and His moral government of the world, who set themselves, in the pursuit of truth, to examine into the formation and growth of the Bible, and to submit its contents to a searching analysis. Such men, whatever the results of their inquiries, could not be classed with the profane scoffers and despisers of religion, nor could their conclusions be satisfactorily set aside without examination, on the plea that they were the corrupt fruits of a

corrupt heart. And when it was found that these critics, with whatever differences of detail, generally agreed in discovering in the historical statements, and the moral and religious teaching, of the Bible, especially of its earlier portions, a good deal that is inconsistent with our present knowledge, and betrays signs of human fallibility and ignorance ; the natural consequence was, that a shock was given to the religious convictions of many, and a wide-spread alarm excited, lest the priceless boon of a divine revelation should in the end be snatched from our hands.

It was this feeling of perplexity and alarm that brought one of my parishioners to me for advice and comfort. His son had returned from college full of the new criticism, eager to ventilate the opinions it had taught him, and armed with a number of learned books to back up his statements. It was a sore trial for the father. As an old-fashioned believer, he had been accustomed to look on the Bible as being, practically, a perfect and infallible rule of faith, to which he only needed to go, humbly and with entire submission of his own understanding, to find instruction in all that concerned his soul's health. But now he was rudely shaken out of this comfortable security.

He was told of a human element pervading the sacred records, and introducing into them not a little that is temporary and imperfect. He was warned against implicitly accepting as truth everything that they contained ; and informed that he must winnow and sift them, test and verify them, and take care that he did not mistake the adulterating alloy for the pure metal of truth. All this had sadly perplexed and pained the old man ; and after some fruitless endeavours to find his way through these new difficulties, he had come to me to see if I could help him.

I told him that the criticism which had disturbed his repose had called forth many defenders of the Bible against it, who had taken the objections of the critics one by one, and endeavoured to answer them. Probably it would appear that some of the objections were founded on mistakes, and others were superficial and captious, and such as would not be urged against any other book. Of the rest it was not unlikely that some owed the greater part of their force to our ignorance of ideas, customs, or modes of expression, that were current in those remote times, or of unrecorded facts which, if known, would have cleared up the difficulties ; and if there were others,

which at present baffled every attempt to reply to them convincingly, it was still not impossible that they might be disposed of at some future time.

He gave me to understand, however, that such considerations as these failed to rid him of his perplexity. He had been himself looking into several of the books written in reply to the critics, and had not been thoroughly set at ease by them. Some of the objections, no doubt, were proved shallow, and destitute of real force; and the critics themselves were often convicted of inconsistencies and blunders. But, on the other hand, he could not help feeling that the arguments of the apologists sometimes resembled too much the special pleadings of the advocate, and that their zeal was not always tempered by candour and knowledge. They betrayed too much tendency to slur over difficulties, to obscure the points at issue in a cloud of words, and to strain discordant passages in order to force them into agreement. In a considerable number of cases they had no explanation to give. That, at least, was the general impression which his dipping into these controversial writings had left on his mind; and it was far from being satisfactory or reassuring. At any rate,

whether he was right or wrong in yielding himself to this impression, it was abundantly evident that the controversy is a very intricate and difficult one, and not likely to be brought to any speedy decision. It requires learning and ability which few possess, and even to judge on which side the advantage lies is by no means easy. As long as it remained undecided, how could he fall back on his old belief, that the Bible is a sure and safe guide to divine truth? What was he to do? Were his reverence for Holy Scripture as the Word of God, his confidence in its teaching, his use of it to guide his faith and conduct, all to hang in suspense, till a set of learned scholars had threshed out their great dispute, and come to an agreement which seemed likely to be as remote as the Millennium? And suppose it were to happen that the critics should finally have the best of the fight, must he in that case give up the Bible, and with it surrender all that long experience had made more precious to him than life itself? It seemed intolerable, absurd, that his faith and hope should be suspended on the doubtful issue of a learned controversy; but how could he extricate himself from a state of harassing uncertainty, now that the question

had been raised, and remained, so far as he could see, unsolved ?

I could not but sympathize with my worthy friend's distress, and turn over in my mind the best way of alleviating it. It appeared to me to arise, in great part, from confusing two questions that are really far asunder, and of very different degrees of importance. There is a primary question :—

Was the Bible written and compiled under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so as to become a sufficient and trustworthy record and vehicle of God's progressive revelation of Himself to mankind ?

If this be decided in the affirmative, there is then a secondary question :—

Is the Bible free from error of every kind, and infallible in all its statements ? In other words, were its writers and compilers so miraculously controlled and guided by the Spirit, as to be preserved from falling into any mistakes, however trivial, or mingling anything savouring of human imperfection with the truths which they were commissioned to record and declare ?

Between these two questions there is a wide interval. The former is vital ; if decided in the negative there would be an end of the

peculiar sacredness and authority of Scripture. But the latter, however important and interesting, cannot fairly be said to be vital : a negative decision of it would by no means invalidate the divine character of the Book. It would be quite consistent to hold, on the strength of certain evidence, that the authors of the sacred books were truly assisted by the Spirit to convey divine instruction to mankind, and that their writings are a sacred storehouse of God's revealed truth ; and at the same time to allow, if facts inexorably demanded it, that what proceeded from their pens was in some degree conditioned by the circumstances of their times, and the bent of their own minds and characters, so that it was not an absolutely pure and perfect expression of divine truth, but an expression of it coloured and modified, in some measure, by the imperfection of human thought and knowledge. It would be quite possible to stand fast in the first position, while leaving the question of entire infallibility open, or even accepting a negative decision of it. The Bible, on this view, though less perfect theoretically than on the view of its absolute infallibility, would still furnish the divine rule of faith and conduct, provided that diligent study and spiritual insight were brought to

bear on its interpretation, to distinguish anything that might be merely temporary or human from the divine and eternal truth.

Now, it seemed to me that it is with the second only of these questions that Biblical criticism is properly concerned. The antecedent problems of theism, providence, miracles, and revelation, do not lie within its province. These are settled for it, on other grounds, before it begins its work. It brings to the Bible the idea of a righteous and loving Father, revealing Himself therein to His children, and guiding them to a saving knowledge of His will and ways. With the fundamental ideas of the Bible, such as the holiness and love of God, the spiritual nature of man, the evil of sin, the need of pardon and grace, the unveiling of everlasting life in Christ, with these criticism, as such, ought to have no quarrel. Its work is literary, not theological. Its office is to deal with the letter of the sacred records ; to inquire into their age, authorship, structure, and history ; to ascertain their exact meaning ; to investigate their consistency with each other, and with the teaching of our modern sciences ; to trace in them the growth of religious ideas, the fulfilments of prophecy, the progressive development of revelation as man-

kind were fitted to receive it, or God was pleased to impart it.

When, therefore, criticism in its comprehensive survey of the sacred Scriptures, and accurate analysis of their contents, claims to have discovered in them what may be called flaws and imperfections, traces of human infirmity and misunderstanding, or the admixture of a fallible element with the divinely revealed truth, it is with the second question alone that it is dealing. Whether such discoveries are real and valid is another matter, with which I am not now concerned. What I am pointing out is merely this, that in asserting those results of its method it is not to the first question that criticism is furnishing a negative reply, but only to the second. Should the alleged discoveries establish themselves as real additions to human knowledge, no doubt they would affect our views of the precise nature and limits of Inspiration, and drive us from the extreme position that it conferred infallibility on the writers. But beyond that point it could not compel us to recede. That the Bible is divinely ordained to furnish us with a trustworthy record of God's dealings with mankind, and the revelations and instructions connected with and forming part of them, is a fact es-

tablished by evidence which lies outside the province and beyond the reach of criticism, and cannot be affected by any of its discoveries.

Taking this view of the sphere of biblical criticism, and the limits within which its results are necessarily confined, I thought that the best way to calm my friend's anxieties would be to direct his attention to the grounds on which his belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible rested, and point out how independent they were of the critical questions that were disturbing his mind.

Accordingly I asked him, whether his reception of the Bible as the Word of God had originally been the consequence of a critical examination into the accuracy and consistency of its statements ; whether he had first tested it as thoroughly as he could, and on finding it stand the ordeal had then yielded to its claims and accepted it as divine.

“Certainly not !” was his answer. “It never entered my mind to examine and test the Bible in that way. I was brought up to reverence it as the Word of God ; I found it accepted as such by all Christian Churches ; I learnt that it had always been the sacred book of Christendom. As a Christian, therefore, I received it unhesitatingly and without ques-

tion. Afterwards, as I gained experience, and religion became a personal, living reality to me, the Bible grew into my spiritual consciousness, so to speak, and became inseparably, vitally, rooted in it. I felt that God was speaking to me in its pages. I met Him in it, and was conscious of His presence. It was like a shrine in which my spirit recognized the indwelling Deity. I found my heart searched, cleansed, strengthened by what I read there; under its influences I grew in the life which I felt was divine. Thus the sacred Book itself evidenced its divineness to me, and I could no more doubt that the light of God's truth was shining out of its pages, than that the sun was shining forth from the sky while I was enjoying its light and warmth."

Your history, I replied, is that of most of us who are hereditary Christians, and having received the Bible as our inheritance have found its claims corroborated by our own experience of its power and worth. We did not at first accept it on critical grounds, nor indeed has mere criticism any means of proving it to be of God. Our belief in its inspiration may be said broadly to rest on two main supports—an external one, the story of the wonderful Book, and an internal one, the verdict of our own

experience. Christendom outside us, and our spiritual consciousness within us, these are the chief witnesses that its doctrine is not of man, but of God.

Observe, I continued, how it comes to us authenticated by its history, and the effects it has produced. It has been inseparable from the religion of which it is the written embodiment and organ. Christianity and the Bible are practically identified. The triumphs of the one are equally the triumphs of the other. Christendom may be said to be built on the Bible. It is no exaggeration to assert that this wonderful Book has been the channel or instrument of the mightiest spiritual force that has ever stirred the hearts of mankind. It has gathered round itself, animated and guided, the nations that have led the van of human progress, and attained the highest degrees of civilization and culture. It has entered into their legislation, stimulated their science, moulded their philosophy, created their social morality, to an extent so wide and far reaching that if all which has been due, whether directly or indirectly, to the impulses given by it were blotted out of existence, nearly all that is best in their social, intellectual, moral, and religious life would suffer grievous mutilation, or even

entirely perish. Recollect, too, how mightily it has laid hold of individual hearts, and fashioned individual characters. Millions of our race, and these not the most ignorant or unintellectual part of it, have found in this Book the power of a new life and the support of a new hope. By their contact with it, and incorporation of its truths with their own moral being, they have been inwardly transformed and nurtured into spiritual manhood ; they have lived on its revelations as on food from heaven ; and having by experience learnt its infinite preciousness they have clung to it as to their best treasure, and been ready even to die for it. So that the Bible comes to us with the test and proof of eighteen centuries stamped on it, and offers itself to our acceptance as a record unrivalled and unique, the organ of the most potent spiritual energy that ever searched the conscience, purified the affections, and promoted the growth of mankind in piety and virtue.

To this external witness, I went on to say, must be added that peculiar self-evidencing quality in the Bible, of which your own experience has given you assurance. To the person who fairly entertains it, lays heart and mind open to its influence, and practically makes trial of its guidance, it speaks in a way in

which no other book in the whole range of the world's literature ever speaks. It is a living book to him, a book instinct with spirit. His religious sentiment or faculty is quickened by it, responds to it; perceives in it a divine element, a power and wisdom and suitability to his wants, which are manifestly of God. Thus the witnesses to its divine character by which the Bible is accompanied, when we receive it from the Church as the sacred Book of Christianity, are corroborated to the individual believer by the vital affinity which he discovers between its revelations and his own spirit, and by his personal experience of its power to lead him into conscious relationship to God.

Now, my friend, I added, notice the bearing of these facts on the perplexity which criticism has created in your mind. Neither of the two kinds of evidence, on which your acceptance of the Bible as a divinely inspired book is mainly based, grew out of critical research into its contents, or is dependent on the results at which such research may arrive. What the Bible has been to the world at large, and what it is to you personally, it has been and is, whether criticism can detect flaws in its composition or not. No prying dissection of its structure, no supposed discoveries of

blemishes in its pages, can so much as touch the testimony borne by history to its singular vitality and power, or rob it of one of its triumphs. Whatever are its component parts, its characteristics, or its anomalies, it has been the nutriment of the spiritual life of Christendom in general, and of your own individually. Those are facts which no criticism can possibly alter, and therefore no criticism can justly shake its claims to your reverence and trust. Do you not see, then, that the effects of critical inquiry, in shaking the fabric of Biblical revelation, must necessarily be very limited and insignificant, in comparison of the great truth which stands apart from them, and unaffected by them,—the truth, namely, that in the Bible God has furnished us with a trustworthy and sufficient record of the way in which He has been pleased to make Himself known to mankind? Why distress yourself about the possible victories of the critics within the limited range of their activity, when you know beforehand that it is not in their power to deprive you of your treasure? Let the battle rage, if rage it must, over the subordinate questions of precise date and authorship; historical or scientific exactness of statements and phraseology; gradual development of truth; accommodation

of it to human infirmity ; admixture of it with particles of dross in its passage through the earthen vessels to which it was committed ; and such like. But do not be needlessly anxious about the issue. No doubt, the controversy is full of interest, but it is not vital. Whichever way it goes, the substance of your faith, and the essential divineness of the Bible, are safe ; and while it is in progress, you may with calmness await the result.

Such were the considerations which I put before my friend, and I was thankful to find that they were at least partially successful in appeasing his trouble.

"I perceive," he said, "the force of your distinction between the substance of the Bible and its external form ; between the body of its teaching and its minor features and details. That it is substantially inspired and of divine origin and authority, you would say, is guaranteed by its unique history and effects, and its self-evidencing quality when brought into contact with our spiritual faculty. The further question, whether there is in it, besides its divine element, a human fallible element, mingling with its revealed truths and inspired lessons, may be left without uneasiness for criticism to determine. To a certain extent

this view meets my difficulty, and renders the critical assault less formidable. But I cannot forget that there are critics who claim to have carried their destructive analysis far beyond the limit you have mentioned. They boast of having successfully impugned the general credibility of the Bible, and shaken its whole structure; and they look forward confidently to seeing it crumble away beneath their reiterated attacks. Now, I seem to need some assurance that no fatal success can possibly attend these attacks, which are directed mainly against the miraculous narratives of the Bible. It is certain that the revelations and teaching of the sacred volume are bound up with a framework of miraculous history, from which, speaking generally, they appear to be inseparable. One cannot deny, moreover, that historical records of all kinds are fair objects of critical examination, and are more or less open to question on the grounds of improbability and insufficient evidence. How, then, can I feel sure that the veracity of the essential narratives of the Bible may not be ultimately overthrown by this remorseless scrutiny and analysis, and the whole structure of Biblical revelation be thereby endangered?"

To meet this difficulty I recalled my friend's

attention to the considerations which had already occupied us. The assurance, I said, that sound critical research will never inflict any fatal wound on the Bible through its miraculous framework, is to be found in the story and character of the Bible itself. We have seen what a grand and unique function this Book has fulfilled, in the spiritual development of the human race; and that, as the standing record of divine revelation, it has been, conjointly with the witness borne by the living Church, the great instrument, in the hands of divine Providence, of keeping alive and spreading the knowledge of God's truth in the world. Now that it should have been all this, and thus possess the divine stamp and seal upon it, and yet rest on a pretended historical basis that is no better than legend and fable, is utterly improbable,—one may fairly say, inconceivable. God is a God of truth, and that which has His stamp on it must surely be substantially true. It is a matter of fact, that as often as scepticism has employed merely critical methods, to sap the main outlines of the Biblical narrative, it has signally failed. Other weapons than critical ones have been found necessary for this purpose; weapons drawn from the armoury of the speculative philosophy, which

denies revelation, and miracle, and a supernatural order altogether. The conflict raised by criticism proper belongs to an inferior province, and has no concern with those higher questions. It is limited to subjects which are internal to Christianity, and can never bring into doubt the essential facts, that God has revealed Himself to us, and that He has given us in the Bible a sufficient account of that revelation to guide us to a true knowledge of Himself. This wonderful Book, in the glory of its spiritual triumphs, and in the self-evidencing character of its teaching, carries on its front God's attestation to its substantial truth, and therefore to the substantial veracity of its historical framework.

At this point our conversation was suspended; but a few days later it was renewed, by my friend's coming to talk over several of the practical aspects, in which the subject had presented itself to his mind.

He felt relieved, he said, but not quite at ease. That nothing absolutely vital is at stake in the critical controversy, he was satisfied; but he could not contemplate the possibility of the critics making good their point, that a human and fallible element is concurrent with the divine element in the sacred records, with-

out being sensible of serious pain and loss. Would not the Bible seem to us less perfect, less admirable, than heretofore? Would not our use of it become more difficult, and the results more uncertain? Was there not something derogatory to the inspiring Spirit, in the idea of His teaching being conditioned by human infirmities, and mixed up with human errors?

I saw that he wished to know the worst; not to wait till the controversy over the Bible should be brought to a definite issue, but anticipating the possible termination of it, at least in some degree, in favour of the critics, to look this result in the face, and inquire how it would affect our religious position. There was so much good sense and prudent forecast in this desire, that I could not refuse to help him, by making him acquainted with such reflections on the subject as occurred to my mind. Of course, the discussions into which we were thus led rested on a hypothetical basis. We did not prejudge the issue of the conflict; but supposing that it should incline to the side of the critics, we sought an answer to the question, What then?

I confessed my agreement with him, in thinking that we should be sensible of a loss. It could scarcely be otherwise, if we should be

finally deprived of the repose and security which seem to grow out of the idea of an absolutely perfect and infallible Bible. But to insist on this feeling would be unwise, because it could not have any real weight in the controversy. Facts must be supreme. If those for which the critics contended should be convincingly established, we should have to bow to them, however earnestly our feelings might protest. The tree of knowledge can seldom be eaten of without some inconvenience and loss being incurred. The innocent security of childhood is exchanged, as we grow up, for the responsibility, struggle, and doubt of maturer years. Superstition has its bowers of rest, from which truth drives us forth to face sterner realities. Life is a discipline, a painful progress ; and it is only through trial that we grow towards perfection. If our heavenly Father, in His Providence, should suffer the loss to fall upon us, we might trust Him to make it up to us, and use it for our training in spiritual knowledge and strength.

"But still," rejoined my friend, "the loss would be very considerable. It appears to me that we should be in danger of being 'tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.' We should lose our unerring

compass. Instead of dipping into a well of undefiled truth, and being certain of drawing out nothing but truth, we might unawares get hold of some of the imperfect human element of which the critics speak, and be unable to distinguish it from the living Word of God. Surely, the difference between a book of absolute infallibility, and a book in which truth is mixed up with an indeterminate amount of error, is practically immense ! ”

The difference would, no doubt, strike me as forcibly as it does you, I answered, were I less aware of the labour and study that are needed, even on the supposition of the Bible being infallible, to draw out of it its full and accurate doctrine on any great subject of religious belief. Let me appeal to your historical knowledge. You hold certain Christian doctrines, concerning the Trinity, the Person of Christ, the efficacy of His atonement, the way of justification, the office of the Holy Spirit, the effect of the Sacraments, &c. But how were these doctrines first put into definite forms, and established as parts of the Christian Creed ? Not, certainly, by just dipping into the Bible, and accepting its plain statements ; the process was a much longer and more laborious one. Before the Canon of

Scripture was completed, or became the recognized standard of the Christian Faith, there existed in the church a body of doctrine, received from the teaching of the Apostles ; to this the early Fathers continually appealed, in their disputes with heretics, and by this important aid was furnished to settle the subsequent interpretation of Holy Scripture. It was with this aid, as well as by means of a critical examination of the sacred text, that the Creeds were built up, not all at once, but gradually, and through many years of discussion and conflict, in which all parties appealed to the Bible, but could only arrive at an agreement about its exact meaning by a long, fluctuating battle over each text and each article of faith. And even now, as you know, the agreement is far from complete. There have been scores of religious systems, materially differing from each other, all of which have been confidently built by their adherents on the inspired Word. In fact, so distracting is the variety of meanings of which the Bible is held to be capable, that to this day half Christendom thinks a living infallible interpreter necessary, to tell the world what an infallible Bible really means !

Look at the matter in another way. Suppose that, instead of originally receiving your

creed from the witness of Christendom, you were left to make it out for yourself from the Bible alone. Would it not manifestly be a task of immense difficulty? a task in accomplishing which you would, over and over again, be in danger of blundering into some error? What a comprehensive and careful survey you would need to take of all parts of the sacred volume! What discussions and comparisons of texts would be requisite! How often you would be called on to reconcile what seemed discordant, to eliminate what appeared temporary, to enlarge a narrower statement by a wider, to correct an earlier by a later, to piece together fragmentary intimations, to sift principles out of their transient illustrations, to disentangle intricate trains of thought constructed under conditions of knowledge materially different from your own! In all this process what a perpetual need of dependence on your own fallible judgment, what ample room for the creeping in of error!

Now observe that these difficulties in the use of the Bible, to determine what we are to believe, are not in any way occasioned by a doubt of its perfect infallibility. They grow out of two features, undeniably characteristic of it; namely, the progressive character of its

- ✓ revelations, and the unsystematic manner in which they are conveyed.

Revelation was unquestionably progressive. It grew in clearness, in accuracy, in spirituality, as time rolled on, and men gained higher levels of knowledge and religious capacity. At first they needed to be taught much in the way we teach children, or our missionaries teach the ignorant heathen. To obtain an entrance for divine truth into their dull, sensuous understandings, it needed to be brought down to their level, and clothed in rude metaphors and allegories and anthropomorphic images, which but roughly and imperfectly expressed the spiritual reality. But as they advanced in religious capacity, the divine teaching rose to higher levels, and became fuller, more accurate, more spiritual. A growth and progress of this kind is plainly discernible in the Bible. The earlier books are the least spiritual, the narrowest in scope, the most anthropomorphic in conception and imagery. In the Psalms and prophetical writings the stream of revelation gradually flows purer and fuller, its light becomes brighter and steadier; but it is only in the New Testament that revelation attains its complete development and perfection. Hence in drawing out

doctrine from the Bible, regard must be had to this progressiveness of its teaching. Care must be taken to supplement and modify the earlier by the later parts; to read the law in the light of the prophets, to use the Old Testament under the guidance of the New; and this cannot be adequately done without much study and labour, and exercise of spiritual discernment.

But, besides this source of difficulty in the use of the sacred volume, another arises out of its entirely unsystematic character. Did it resemble a theological treatise, or an orderly syllabus of Christian doctrines; were it full of definitions and propositions, formally stated and drawn out in accurate proportion; the extraction from it of a complete system of belief would have been comparatively easy. But the Bible is nothing of the kind. It is historical, not dogmatic; heterogeneous, not of the same kind of material throughout; unsystematic, discursive, popular. It holds revelation in solution, so to speak; diffused in narratives, in biographies, in chronicles, in codes of law, in sententious maxims, in rhetorical addresses, in casual letters, in poetical compositions, in visions and allegories. Out of this vast repository, to which fifteen cen-

turies of progress and conflict have contributed, to collect together and fit, part to part, in a definite, compact system, the scattered particles of divine truth, what labour, what judgment, must be necessary

Such considerations as these appear to me to be of no insignificant weight, when we try to estimate the loss which would be inflicted on us by the victory of criticism. For if they be true, and I do not see how they can be disputed, then it is not an easy and certain method of ascertaining divine truth that the critics would snatch from us, to replace it by doubt and perplexity. Experience shows, that even when the Bible is understood to be absolutely infallible, the derivation from its pages alone of a complete system of theology is one of the most difficult and perplexing enterprises that the human intellect can take in hand to accomplish. If then the critics should succeed in compelling us to see in the Holy Scriptures a fallible element mingling with the divine teaching, though they might thereby in a measure augment the difficulty, they certainly would not, for the first time, create it. It already exists, and furnishes a discipline for faith, and a test of spiritual discernment.

And I think we may console ourselves with

the thought, that the already existing difficulty would not be very seriously added to by their success. You must not forget, that the Bible has historical Christianity behind it, so to speak, as its guarantee and the illustration of its meaning, in regard to its essential features. The main sources from which Christian doctrine originally flowed, whether in the Bible or outside it, stand above the critical battle over the letter and the details of the sacred records. On either theory about the Bible, there is exactly the same aid of the divine Spirit, dwelling in the Church, to inform and guide the Christian consciousness, in collecting and building up its body of sacred doctrine. It was not by intellectual study alone of the Scriptures that the Church formed and consolidated her creeds, but by the energy also of the spiritual life, that was nourished in her members by their living fellowship with their divine Head. And the same is true of individual believers now. They have not only the Bible in their hands, and an inheritance of Christian theology to guide their use of it; but also the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, to quicken their spiritual perceptions, and enable them to "try the spirits," "prove all things," and "hold fast that which is good."

When, therefore, you express an alarm, lest Biblical criticism should cut us adrift from our anchorage, and send us wandering without compass over an ocean of perplexity and doubt, I cannot but think that you very greatly exaggerate any effect which it is legitimately able to produce. Doubtless, if it shall finally convince us, that divine revelation has been in some degree conditioned by the infirmity of the human instruments through whom it has been conveyed to mankind, the death-blow will be given to the precarious method of citing proof-texts, and resting great doctrines on single phrases or even words. We shall, perforce, be compelled to make a wider examination and more laborious induction, and to rely somewhat more on that faculty of spiritual discernment, which Christ has promised to the humble, diligent learners in His school. But beyond this I see no reason to anticipate any serious consequences from the conclusions at which criticism, in the due exercise of its functions, is likely to arrive; and hence I come round to what I before said, that we may watch the progress of the conflict, with interest indeed, but without apprehension.

“What you have said,” replied my friend, after a pause, “does certainly appear to lessen

one of my difficulties, and that the one which weighed most heavily on my mind. I had so often heard it said, that to detach the least fragment from the edifice of revelation was to endanger the whole building, that I suppose I was faithless enough to imagine our Christian faith and hope to depend on the proof that the Bible is absolutely infallible, down to the least important detail. I trust that I shall have more confidence for the future in the stability of divine truth, and in the inward witness of the Spirit of God. But I should like to hear what you have to say about another of my difficulties. That intermingling of an imperfect human element with the divine element in Holy Scripture, to which critical research points, does it not appear improbable in itself, out of harmony with God's methods of working, and derogatory to the character of the inspiring Spirit of truth? And if so, must not the tendency of criticism be to cast suspicion on inspiration altogether?"

You mean, I replied, that our acquaintance with the character and methods of the Holy Spirit is such as to induce the belief, that if He inspired the writers of Scripture at all, His inspiration must have been so complete and unlimited, as to insure the perfect accuracy

of every syllable in their writings. Now it is rather a precarious and misleading process, to argue that a thing must be, because we think it ought to be. In the case before us, perhaps, we may go so far as this, in anticipating the extent to which inspiration was likely to be granted. When we consider the intimate connexion that exists historically, between God's revelation of Himself to mankind, and the written records of that revelation in the Bible, and trace in the origin, preservation, and story of this Book the wonderful action of the divine Providence, in preparing it, and using it, age after age, for the guidance of His Church, and the spiritual education of our race; when we consider these facts, we may, I think, fairly conclude that the sacred writers must have enjoyed whatever measure of inspiration was really necessary, to fit their writings for the great office which they were manifestly ordained to fulfil. That is, all the circumstances of the case point to a *sufficient* measure of inspiration. But what is a sufficient measure; whether the inspiration might be limited to the conveying of revelation with substantial truth and accuracy, or must extend to every trivial detail and petty incident in the multifarious records; this I do not see that we have

any means of knowing, except by observing the actual result, as it lies before us in the pages of the Bible.

Any help that we can get from analogy, towards answering your question, seems either to favour the critical view, or at least to leave room for it. I cannot recollect any other kind of divine operation in our world, of which the results are not in some degree conditioned by the imperfections of the materials wrought upon, or the instrumentality employed. God's handiwork in the visible universe exhibits marks of what we may, without irreverence, call incongruity and waste. His infinite goodness has not prevented the existence of both physical and moral evil. The sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit does not make its subjects absolutely sinless. Here are instances of the divine energy giving birth to results that are more or less imperfect, or mixed with some strain of frailty or incompleteness. Then again, if we observe the influence exerted by the Holy Spirit on the human agents, whom from age to age He raised up to testify of the will and ways of God, we do not find that He made them always infallibly right, whether in their ideas, their language, or their conduct. Prophets and Apostles sometimes thought

wrongly, spoke wrongly, acted wrongly. So also, although the Spirit of truth is promised to the Church, its General Councils, as the Anglican Articles say, "may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God." Once more, in Holy Scripture itself, it is certain that the action of the inspiring Spirit on the minds of the writers did not overpower their own self-manifestation entirely, but left the peculiarities of their characters, and styles, and modes of thinking, plainly discernible.

Now, analogies and facts like these may not possess much force to guide us in framing an antecedent idea of the nature of inspiration; for it is conceivable that inspiration may be a unique fact, unlike any other we are acquainted with. But in the absence of any intimation, that the action of the Holy Spirit in bestowing inspiration is altogether peculiar and unique, these illustrations of God's methods of working have a certain negative force. They restrain us from pronouncing the idea of a graduated, or modified, inspiration to be in itself incompatible with the divine attributes, or derogatory to the Spirit of truth. In a word, they warn us off from the unsafe ground of speculation, and send us to the inspired documents them-

selves, to learn, by a critical examination, what kind or degree of influence the Holy Spirit was pleased to exert on their authors.

These considerations had a good effect in pacifying my worthy parishioner's alarm, and he was able with more serenity to hear the Bible examined in the critical manner. Still, it was evident that he looked back with a fond regret to the undisturbed confidence of his past days. "In this world of change and error," he remarked to me one day, "it seemed such a grand and blessed thing to possess one sure, perfect, infallible standard, by which we might try all the fluctuating forms of human opinion. He could scarcely reconcile himself to the thought, that these inquisitive and inexorable critics might possibly prevail to rob him of this only unerring and absolute guide into truth, or at least compel him to esteem it less perfect than he had hitherto done. He might perhaps, in his gratitude and affection, have yielded to the letter of the Bible an almost idolatrous reverence; still he shrank from surrendering one jot or tittle of it, almost as he would shrink from an act of sacrilege."

Well, my friend, I replied, the discussions we have had together are only hypothetical, and by way of preparing ourselves for

the worst. We have been trying to see where we shall be, if the critics in the end shall make out their case. So long as you are not convinced that they have made it out, you do well to hold fast your old belief. Nothing short of irresistible conviction should disturb you in it. What I have endeavoured to show you for your comfort is just this : that even should the worst happen, our loss would not be fatal ; no, not even serious. Should the contingency never be realized, you will have no occasion for the consolation.

But when you spoke just now of the blessing of possessing in the Bible an unerring and absolute guide into truth, surely you were thinking of what might have been, rather than of what actually is ! A Christendom drawing out of the Bible a common faith, and holding it in unity of spirit, is a bright ideal, but alas ! never yet seen upon earth. There could scarcely be more distraction, more division, than that which actually exists, if the belief in the entire infallibility of the Bible were universally replaced by the view for which the critics contend. Why should we be tormenting ourselves with the fear that their success may throw us into confusion, when the confusion already exists to such a degree

as, practically, to be incapable of being aggravated?

But I will not end our conversations on this interesting subject, I added, by pointing to the melancholy distractions of Christendom. I would rather take leave of it with the more cheering reflection, how little, after all, the Bible as a whole would be damaged, even though all for which Biblical criticism can legitimately contend were conceded.

We know what a serious alarm was excited, when an examination of the numerous Greek manuscripts of the New Testament first brought to light the existence of many thousands of various readings in the text. Timid believers were ready to think that the Christian revelation itself was in peril. But a calm estimate soon showed that nothing of importance was at stake, and that the countless petty variations no more impair the substance of revelation, than the superficial scratches and stains destroy the proportions of some antique masterpiece of sculpture. Almost as much may be said with truth, about the results of a critical analysis of the sacred Scriptures. Let the grand old volume come back to us from the hands of its severest critics, with their mark on every blemish and inaccuracy which in their

lynx-eyed scrutiny of its contents they can pretend to have detected; and, though we might miss something here, and something there, and be compelled to view some of its minor features with a little less of confidence or admiration, still on the whole, as to its spiritual substance, and its ability "to make us wise unto salvation," it would remain as noble and precious a possession as ever. It would still stand before our eyes, unrivalled and unique in the literature of the world; the most priceless heirloom that has come down to us from antiquity; the most majestic monument of God's dealing with our race; and the never-failing source of truth, purity, and consolation, for the yearning hearts of all who "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

If Christian persons would only consider, that the grandeur and divineness of the Bible do not depend on the literal accuracy of every comparatively trivial or occasional statement in its pages, but on the heavenly truths that it unfolds, the spirit that breathes in it, and its power to raise us into fellowship with God, they would view the progress of Biblical criticism with equanimity. For these are characteristics of the sacred volume, that no critical ingenuity or research can ever filch from it.

Do what the critic may, he can never prevent our finding in the Bible such strains of sublimity, beauty, and tenderness, such glimpses of spiritual heights, such attractive examples of piety and virtue, such stirring appeals to the conscience, such self-evidencing revelations of God's holiness and love, of His grace in Christ, and of the mystery and method of our salvation, as penetrate and sway our hearts with a divine power, and constrain us to confess that God is in it of a truth. Such things as these are the ineffaceable stamp on its front, that it is indeed the Book of the Oracles of God, the divinely ordained monument and record of the progressive revelations which God at sundry times and in divers manners made unto our forefathers, and by which He is still pleased to speak unto us their children.

THE END.

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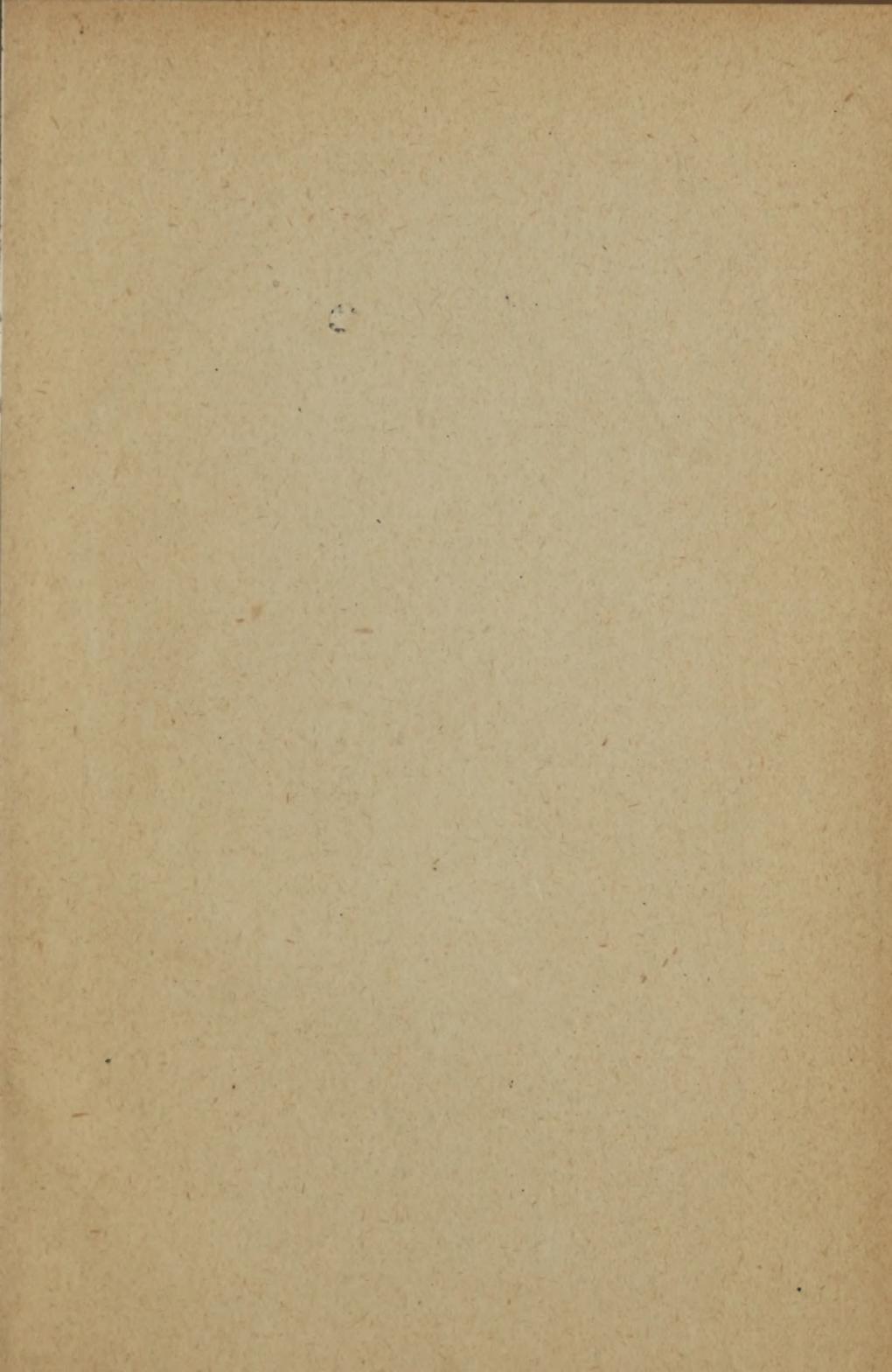
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